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Pre-Notes

2 February 2020.

Hey! Before you start reading, here are a few notes:

- This story is incomplete and **will not be re-written**. I may however edit / touch up on grammar when I have time

- Some characters are inspired by Portal and Soul Eater. Credit to ValvE and Atsushi Ōkubo for the said series

- The Warrior Cat universe goes to all the Erin Hunters

- Songs from various artists are used to capture the theme or atmosphere of a chapter. Some lyrics may have been edited to reflect certain characters or events that occur

- Fallen Leaves is not about the cat who lived in the tunnels, but a motif for the fanfiction

- Mysticwarrior designed the front cover (thanks!)

- This is my first fan fiction

- So there may be plotholes

Huzzah.

Allegiances

Last Updated: 2 February 2020

*A/N: Some characters weren't created by me, but were sent to me by some Wattpad users years ago. Unfortunately most of them will not appear in this story!

~ *CreekClan*

Leader
Hawkstar - Broad, long-haired brown tom with pale tabby markings and dark blue eyes

Deputy
Foxmuzzle - Fox-pelted tom with wise yellow eyes

Medicine Cat
Birdsong - Light brown she-cat with gentle forest-green eyes and silver spotted-tabby markings
Apprentice Eelpaw

Warriors
Mudsplash - Brown velvet-furred tom with white patches and dark blue eyes
Apprentice Willowpaw

Weaseldash - Light ginger tom with a white left-hind paw, orange eyes and a brown tail-tip

Squirrelfur **(By _Queen_Elsa_)** - Dark ginger she-cat with stunning forest-green eyes and a white right-front paw

Dewfeather - Aging pale grey she-cat with humorous green eyes

Apprentice Honeypaw

Moonclaw **(By moonstar314159265)** - Grey tabby tom with green eyes

Icetalon - White tom with stern brown eyes
Apprentice Pouncepaw

Hawkfeather **(By auroravenus9472)** - Dark brown tabby she-cat with shocking green eyes

Streamsplash - Light grey tabby she-cat with light blue eyes

Reedfang - Sleek, jet-black tom with worried amber eyes and a white nose-tip
Apprentice Nightpaw

Mothpetal - Golden-dapple she-cat with unusually large copper eyes

Sootwhisker - Dark-whiskered, muscular coal-black tom with amber eyes

Blueripple - Lithe blue-grey she-cat with lighter flecks and honest ice-blue eyes

Apprentices
Nightpaw - Strong smoky-black tom with navy blue eyes, white paws and underbelly

Pouncepaw - Black-and-white tuxedo tom with grey eyes

Eelpaw - Blue-grey tom with water-blue eyes

Honeypaw - Cream-coloured she-cat with dark green eyes and black-rimmed ears

Willowpaw - Grey-silver tabby she-cat with dark green eyes

Queens
Russetdawn - Russet-red she-cat with yellow eyes and grisly scars on her left cheek and flank

(Mother of Hawkstar's kits)
Stormkit - Large dark grey tom with blazing dark blue eyes and a brown tail-tip

Featherkit - Silver tabby she-cat with determined dark grey eyes and one white left-front paw

Rosekit - Tortoiseshell-and-white she-cat with green eyes and red-brown 'socks'

Mousefern - Protective pale silver she-cat with darker flecks, a ginger nose-tip and warm green eyes

(Mother of Foxmuzzle's kit)
Wheatkit - Absurdly tall pale-gold tom with stratosphere blue eyes and dark grey Somali markings

Birchflower - Old tortoiseshell-and-white she-cat with orange eyes and grey paws

(Mother of Icetalon's kits)
Pebblekit - Stone-coloured tom with lighter grey spots and gold, violet-flecked eyes

Skykit - Pure white tom with copper eyes and pale ginger stripes across his back

Elders
Littlestone - Small dark grey tabby tom with one blue eye and one blind brown eye

Scarface - Frail black tom with amber eyes and deep scars around his face

~ BirchClan

Leader
Swallowstar - Sleek black she-cat with a red throat, green eyes and white paws

Deputy
Larksong - Small, brown-and-ginger tom with blue eyes and long

claws

Medicine Cat
Bumbleberry - Wise grey tom with a ginger muzzle and brown eyes
Apprentice Flickerpaw

Warriors
Treespring - Dark brown Somali tom with a long bushy tail and green eyes

Cloudfeather - White, symmetrical she-cat with grey ears and brown eyes

Blaze - Long-haired, golden tom with dark blue eyes and a dark gold forehead blaze - Kittypet
Apprentice Fallowpaw

Longjaw - Bad-tempered, copper-eyed pale brown tom with a long muzzle
Apprentice Ebonypaw

Lakestone - Silver-tabby she-cat with blue eyes and remarkably long hind legs

Smoke - Aggressive dark grey tom with huge white paws and dark blue eyes - Kittypet

Apprentices
Ebonypaw - Dark brown tabby tom with amber eyes

Fallowpaw - Shy light ginger she-cat with green eyes

Flickerpaw - Pale blue-grey tom with lighter flecks and shy silver eyes

Queens
Chirpsong - Small ginger she-cat with brown splotches and yellow eyes

(Expecting Longjaw's kits)

Foxpetal **(By Fairytail_girl)** - Dark fox-red she-cat with teal-

waterfall eyes, barely visible stripes along her sides, and a white muzzle and tail-tip
(Mother of Copperstream's [Dead] kits)

Oakkit - Easygoing dark brown tabby tom with black stripes and amber eyes

Amberkit - Troublesome golden-brown she-kit with blue eyes, and a slight limp in right-front leg

Maplekit - Small light fox-red she-kit with teal-waterfall eyes

Elders
Braveheart - Moons old, brown-ginger tom with green eyes and a white-flecked muzzle

Yarrowthroat - Small, pale grey she-cat with white flecks, pale blue eyes and a great lump in her neck

~ MarshClan

Leader
Viperstar - Huge white tom with dark amber eyes, black paws, nose-tip, ear rims and a tail-tip that is dented
Apprentice Shadowpaw

Deputy
Clawshadow - Light brown Siberian tom with a scarred face and dark blue eyes

Medicine Cat
Smokecloud - Smoke-grey tom with blue eyes and several scars on his tail
Apprentice Pinepaw

Warriors
Mistleaf - Light-brown she-cat with forest-green eyes and lighter tabby markings that join into 'rings'

Quietwhisker - Small silver she-cat with darker flecks and light blue eyes

Maplestrike - Fierce brown-and-tortoiseshell tom with a black muzzle and dark blue eyes
Apprentice Spiderpaw

Rubbleweed - Large auburn tom with ginger stockings and light blue eyes

Moonrose **(By Exoticstar)** - Dark grey tabby she-cat with shimmering light blue eyes

Toadhop - Dark brown tom with amber eyes
Apprentice Poisonpaw

Apprentices
Shadowpaw - Cocky black tom with a long tail, grey paws and amber eyes

Pinepaw - Dark brown tom with black paws and concerned blue eyes

Poisonpaw **(By Exoticstar)** - Adventurous black tom with a white underbelly, muzzle, paws and blazing amber eyes

Spiderpaw - Long-legged, tawny-coloured she-cat with ginger ear fur and light blue eyes

Queens
Ivyleaf - Vicious jet-black she-cat with green eyes and a white-tipped tail

(Mother of Clawshadow's kits)
Fangkit - Big, dark brown Persian tom with blue eyes

Hollykit - Black she-cat with dark blue eyes and white paws

Elders
Swampfoot - Thickset brown tom with scarred grey paws and blue eyes

Kestrelpaw - Young dark brown tom with blind dark blue eyes and a scarred muzzle

~ HillClan

Leader
Amberstar - Proud ginger-red she-cat with pale spots and light green eyes

Deputy
Deerfallow - Big deer-pelted tom with dark green eyes

Medicine Cat
Racoonmask - Lithe dark grey tom with darker stripes and a white 'mask' between his green eyes

Warriors
Cloverpad - Silver tabby she-cat with gentle dark green eyes
Apprentice Frostpaw

Falconwing - Small light brown tom with a darker underbelly and light blue eyes
Apprentice Smallpaw

Lichenfoot - Tabby tom with grey paws and copper eyes

Dovestrike **(By Exoticstar)** - Light silver she-cat with green eyes

Thrushwhisker - Light brown she-cat with dark blue eyes, and a white patch on either side of her pelt
Apprentice Badgerpaw

Apprentices
Smallpaw - Fast pale tabby she-cat with small paws and green eyes

Badgerpaw - Wiry black tom with white patches and dark blue eyes

Frostpaw **(By Exoticstar)** - Light silver she-cat with green eyes

Queens
Grassflower - Cheery ginger she-cat with light green eyes, and scars on her legs

(Expecting Falconwing's kits)

Elders

Mousepatch - Fairly old brown tom with lighter patches and blue eyes

Leaf - Tortoiseshell she-cat with green eyes - Kittypet

~ *Outside the Clans*

Kainda **-** Light ginger she-cat with copper eyes and brown chest and paws - Former loner turned kittypet

Rose **(By Fairytail _girl)** - Small, slender black she-cat with a white-tipped tail and icy blue eyes - Loner

Sally **-** Small brown she-cat with lazy ice-blue eyes - Kittypet

Gorge **(By Exoticstar)** - Light brown she-kit with silver (almost blue) paws and sapphire-blue eyes - Loner

Elsa **(By auroravenus9472)** - Platinum blond she-cat with stunning blue eyes - Loner

Sharpbone - Yellow-eyed black-and-white tom with scars in his thickset pelt - Rogue

Tooth - One-eared female dog-fox mix that lives near a Twolegplace

0 A Mysterious Prophecy

Last Updated: 9 July 2017

Silvery moonlight filtered on the still, moss-covered trees. The towering giants surrounded a large, vacant clearing. Within their gnarled grips sat a gleaming pool in the centre. Beside the pool loomed a huge, jagged boulder, one that had been eroded over countless seasons. If a cat peered closely, they would see that it was covered in many tiny, glowing scratchmarks. The scratchmarks of ancient cats.
Without a rustle or a hiss, starry warriors, young and old, slipped through the torn undergrowth. Three young cats scraped their broken claws against the hard surface, muscles straining at the effort of such a simple task. The largest was a dark brown tom flicking a torn ear. The second was a wiry ginger she-cat, also with a torn ear. By far the smallest, a scrawny grey apprentice owned wild blue eyes darting from side to side, as if expecting an attack. The she-cat comfortingly nudged the apprentice, as the tom bellowed, "Warriors of StarClan, we gather here tonight to discuss an event so catastrophic, even we weren't able to prevent it!"
This prompted yowls of fear and panic amongst the gathered cats. The frightened cries of kits and the howls of elders mingled into one bone-chilling yowl, one that would give even the most cold-hearted of cats nightmares. Spines shivered.
"Calm down, everybody!" he yowled above the dreadful noise. "Like the Great Battle seasons ago, there *is* a way to stop the Dark Forest from overrunning us!"
A white, ginger-tailed she-cat swept her three kits closer to her, mewing with agitated worry, "How, Oakwhisker? If *we* can't stop this, then no cat can!"
This caused more cats to yowl in despair.
"Gingertail, nothing is impossible. Nothing. Now, only the cats gathered here managed to escape from the battle that rages on behind us. You will be the ones to hear the prophecy given to us-" He motioned towards the other two cats, to the grey tom in particular.

"-and Greypaw here knows it the best. Please tell them what you know."
"Go on. Everything will be okay," prompted the she-cat, blinking warm green eyes.
"Thanks, Goldenpelt," he breathed in a quiet mew. He then took a deep breath and meowed in a shaky voice:
"Cats of StarClan, in the middle of green-leaf, I received a prophecy for our loved ones living beside the lake. A short time later, the Dark Forest was seen amassing in great numbers near the border and so, stupid me, I prioritised investigating this over warning the Clans... My foolishness has caused several Clan cats to have joined our ranks sooner than expected, and has caused this current battle to be worse than it should be. However, let's not dwell on the past; the prophecy goes as foretold:
"Admist the growing ruins of the once tranquil lives,
There is revenge sought in the hearts of evil and deception.
But if the infant and the ancient shall come together,
The broken Clans may survive once again.
"The prophecy still needs proper decoding both StarClan and the Lake cats, but, I fear the path to complete it will be riddled with many challenges in the moons to come."
Far from any howls or yowls, Greypaw's speech had plunged the whole clearing into silence, so silent in fact, a cat could almost hear battle cries in the distance. The small meow of "Well said, young warrior" from an elder broke the silence and encouraged the other cats to murmur amongst themselves. Goldenpelt brushed her furry tail along Greypaw's back and purred, "I'm proud of you, brother."
"It was nothing," he dismissed modestly, but he was purring all the same.
"Okay," Oakwhisker's deep mew made the whispering cats pay attention, "Our comrades are out there, fighting for their lives, so we need to return-"
"But wait!" Gingertail interrupted, "How will the Clans receive the prophecy?"
Oakwhisker hesitated for a moment. "StarClan will hold another meeting after the battle."
"But who-?"
With that, Oakwhisker bounded off the jagged rock and raced into the bushes, "Let us fight with our loyal Clanmates!"
"For the Clans, for the lake, for peace!" The other warriors and

apprentices yowled the StarClan war cry, following him into the undergrowth. This left the queens, elders and kits with injured warriors to guard them. As Gingertail gathered her young and herded them into a tree hollow, she muttered under her breath, "Inexperienced warriors. Always putting their emotions before common sense. That's what kills them so quickly."

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It's a truth that in love and war,
Worlds collide,
And hearts get broken.
I want to live like I know I'm dying,
Take up my cross,
Not be afraid.

Is it true what they say, that words are weapons?
And if it is, then everybody best stop steppin',
'Cause I got ten in my pocket that'll bend ya locket,
I'm tired of all these rockers sayin' come with me.

It creeps in like a thief in the night,
Without a sign, without a warning,
But we are ready and prepared to fight,
Raise up your swords,
Don't be afraid.

Wait, it's just about to break,
It's more than I take,
Everything's about to change.
I feel it in my veins,
It's not going away,
Everything's about to change...

The War of Change - Thousand Foot Krutch
~~~~

1 The Outside World

Last Updated: 9 July 2017

Drowsy but attentive, Wheatkit's senses sharpened at the shrill yowl of his denmate, Rosekit. Surprised, he bit down on his mother's teat. Mousefern jerked and hissed, detaching Wheatkit from her soft belly and the sweet, warm milk. *Milk!* was his only thought as was sent rolling, rolling over itchy reeds, closer to the scuffle of moss and patters of many paws. With Darkness surrounding him, only mews guided him to his bearings.
"Listen to me!"
"Yes, my kit?" a cat responded in a smooth soft-growl. That was Rosekit's mother, Russetdawn, or *Her.* Her was Wheatkit's special name for her.
"Can we go outside today?" Rosekit's tangy scent competed with an excitement that made Wheatkit's whiskers tingle. "Stormkit, Featherkit and I want to play in leaves before leaf-fall ends!"
"Wheatkit hasn't opened his eyes yet so it wouldn't be fair, would it? If he opened them sooner, instead of rolling, we could all stretch our legs."
The tom-kit felt something was wrong with the pressure put on his name. He crawled kittensteps for Mother's comfort but she was not there. He scented her nearby but the stuffy, still air of the nursery was fragrant with other scents of milk, cats and strange Outside scents. This worried Wheatkit. So, he proclaimed his discomfort with a tail-slap and a mewl, but it was lost over the agreement from Rosekit:
"Yeah, I've been waiting all morning!" Chilly air wreathed around him, made his dainty fur shiver. To his not-preference, a huge pad poked his eyelid. "Open up, slow trout! It's taken you half a season just to-"
She never finished as a stronger breeze whipped past the flinching tom-kit. There was a *whuff*, a squeal, the crackle of reeds and a piercing gust of fresh air that blew Wheatkit's whiskers back. What was that?
"Do not touch Wheatkit like that again, Rosekit!" Mother's hiss.

Then there was a yowl from Russetdawn which faded with her scent. Then the surrounding Dark, his 'eyesight', dropped a shade darker. A rough tongue caressed his uncertainty and herded it away with a warm soft-growl. Mother's soft-growl. He was glad for her presence, but why was Mother's scent so, so angry? Her fur so, so stiff? Wheatkit mewled louder: *Milk! Milk!*
Again, the kit's needs were interfered by Birchflower's hoarse croak, "My, is HillClan invading? Rosekit appears to have taken a tumble!"
"A big one; look at the size of that gap, Pebblekit!" That was Skykit to his left, Birchflower's kit. His scent always stank of some prey called 'dragonflies'. But only HillClan kits ate dragonflies.
"I'm hot. And don't let Russetdawn hear you or she'll claw your fur off! Twice!" Pebblekit complained. His scent was his name, strangely.
There was an angered hiss, more crashes and tears.
"I heard that! And Rosekit, just look at your fur! Featherkit, Stormkit, come and help your sister- Ouch! Stupid reed. I'll get of rid it just like I will get rid of Birchflower's kits..."
There were terrified whimpers from Birchflower's litter.
As two small breezes brushed past Wheatkit, and Featherkit's and Stormkit's fiery and fierce scent starting fading, a very, very stern voice boomed like his Mother's heartbeat pressed against him now.
"I heard a crash over here. What's wrong with Rosekit?"
And how the mud scent made Wheatkit's nose wrinkle! Cats alive! Suddenly a bubbling uncertainty popped the wrong way inside Wheatkit's belly, like that constant sound of water splashing outside camp, one you either got used to or tore moss trying. As there was only one CreekClan warrior who smelt like mud...
"Icetalon, she's fine!" Russetdawn snapped, "All my kits are fine!"
There was an unnatural pause, then Skykit yowled, "My da is here! One of the senior warriors of CreekClan! Beat that, Stormkit!"
"My mother is also a senior warrior, and my father is the *leader!* Just wait until he comes; he'll make you clean out the elders!"
As Birchflower and Mousefern chuckled, jolting Wheatkit up and down in between them, harsh pawsteps stepped down into the nursery. Icetalon meowed, "Our kits are at it again. I'm sorry, Russetdawn."
"I'm considering your apology." She was still outside.
"But I'm not here for that...Has anycat seen Foxmuzzle? He's supposed to be sorting water patrols, but I haven't seen him since

dawn."
Mother crushed Wheatkit between her unsheathed paws. "What?"
Birchflower soft-growled to Wheatkit's left, "He must be hunting for the Clan, working hard as always. I think I've worked hard enough all these moons to earn me a nap." She yawned.
Russetdawn's scent started growing stronger, and her kits brushed past him, cramping the nursery with four more cats. Most annoyingly, Rosekit's fur twitched against his nose, she complained, and would keep complaining about itchy reeds stuck in her fur. In the meantime, her littermates, Pebblekit and Skykit distracted her with a game of sorts; something that made them squeak and scuffle moss. An empty hole gaped inside Wheatkit, longing to join in, but he wouldn't open his eyes; Rosekit wouldn't have the best of him yet! (How dare she poke his eye.)
Then Mother's tone was strange, twitching tail tickling her wordless son, "Are you sure? Where was he headed? Did other cats see him? Did he get lost? Attacked by a predator? Has he-"
"Calm down," was Icetalon's mew, and Mother sheathed her paws, relaxed her crushing grip. Wheatkit gaped his tiny maw in relief. Foxmuzzle had once told Wheatkit, "Icetalon can soothe an argument with a phrase, just as Russetdawn excels in starting one." He called it 'charisma': it was what made the senior warriors so 'popular' among their Clanmates. Wheatkit hoped he had 'charisma' and 'popular' as a warrior.
Then Mother meowed, "What if-"
And Icetalon meowed, "All queens jump at the slightest disturbance."
And Russetdawn meowed, "We do not!" Her voice rose, pawsteps flattened. "Mousefern, addressing your concerns, do have den fever? Do you require a walk outside?"
As Mother's paws unsheathed again, Icetalon mewed, "Birchflower and I would be glad to have company on our evening walk."
Birchflower snored in reply.
"Or perhaps-"
"Forget it, fish-brain," Russetdawn hissed above the clamour of the kits, "Not all she-cats are mooned by your charms."
Wheatkit's denmates snorted at this, Stormkit mewling, "Beat that, Skykit!" Skykit mrr-owed, there was a *buff*, moss rubbed the wrong way against Wheatkit's itchy belly, then- Cats alive! The nursery was shaking! Whiskers tingling, fur bristling, Wheatkit half-

scrambled, half-wriggled, terrified underneath the safety of Mother's belly, away from the ground-shaking, away from the monstrous kit-squeals, the bellowing roars from older cats, the terror of sound!
"Enough!"
That was Mother. Her voice hissed, her stomach almost crushed him. Wheatkit trembled. He could smell his own fear-scent.
"Stormkit, Skykit, look how your bickering, your fighting terrified Wheatkit! Countless times I've told you, your littermates not to play roughly, and still you do! Have you no common sense, even at your age?"
A huge scent from the tom-kits bowled Wheatkit's senses. It smelt of terror, shame and a brilliant after-fight-excitement. Wheatkit only wanted the lack of scary kit-squeals to continue. Icetalon allowed his kit a lecture as appropriate (Besides, Wheatkit thought, not even 'charisma' could halt Mother in this terrifying state), and Russetdawn herself was thumping her paws with amusement.
"I'm really sorry," Skykit was first, Stormkit following with only a mutter.
"Speak up!" Mother prompted. Everykit flinched.
"Sorry." Stormkit spat. A moment after, his soily scent merged with the other kits. They continued their moss game now as the quietest mice. At least the loud tom-kits had apologized (they had really scared Wheatkit!).
As Mousefern started lapping Wheatkit's fur very painfully and fast, which made him scrabble away, only to be pawed back, Icetalon added, "I apologize, Mousefern. The kits only grew excitable since I visited. Once again, sorry-"
"Forget it. Please make sure Foxmuzzle comes back to camp safe. And ask another warrior to fix the nursery barrier." Mother didn't stop lapping.
Over his discomfort, Wheatkit thought it amazing how Birchflower still slept. Then Icetalon's scent was gone, overpowered by Russetdawn's watery one. She was padding close to Wheatkit's left, near Birchflower. Free air was gulped eagerly. Fur wet, the shaking in Wheatkit's heart and stomach was slowing. It felt good.
Then the lapping ceased. His fur tingled cold as wind swept over it. He shivered. Mother nuzzled his muzzle to her belly, though Wheatkit found the moss beneath his tender pawpads hot from her previous position. *Too hot!* he thought, kneading his paws instinctively. Then his tiny maw discovered a cooler, but still warm

round flesh. He nipped it twice and tasted milk. Mother's teat. He was suckling within a moment.

~

The same conversation and cats roused Wheatkit from his nap.
"No can do for now, Rosekit. Don't look so disappointed; leaf-fall is only halfway through. You have the *whole* season to play in the leaves."
"Urrh. Fine. We'll play with Birchflower's tail or something instead."
Wheatkit was almost certain that Rosekit's gaze was burning into his pelt as he heard her tromp off towards her siblings. He hoped that her eyes didn't look as terrifying as the prickle of unease he felt right now. If they were...Wheatkit gulped. He shivered, but he didn't feel a wind coming from the hole Rosekit had made earlier. Mousefern seemed to notice this and cooed, "You're shivering again, Wheatkit! Are you all right?" She started to lick his fur the wrong way to warm him up, even though he was perfectly fine.
"Dwah! Looks like Wheatkit has got a cold at two moons old! It's a new record!" Stormkit's slightly deeper (for a kit) voice sounded somewhere close to his left, his tone full of...Wheatkit couldn't find the word the warriors used to describe Gatherings. Nastiness? No. Horriblee-ness? No! Spite? Yes, that was it.
Spite.
His mother bristled, and Wheatkit felt a sudden shockwave of anger as she let out an almighty hiss at Stormkit, surprising him so much, he let out a frightened squeal of terror at its sheer force. Wheatkit was also frightened out of his wits. He instinctively flattened his ears and pressed his body against the ground, which was an arduous task for such a large-bodied kit like him. However, in the unexpected force of his body hitting the moss-covered floor, he lost control of some of his bodily functions. His legs flailed in all directions, and his eyes flew open, even though he didn't want them to.
The Dark, it's gone!
He was only beginning to adapt to the harsh light and vivid colours, when a blurry silver thing moved into the front line of his vision. As his eyesight struggled to focus, he could see the shape was a silver stripy kit, and even though she appeared, cats alive, two moons older than him, he was nearly up to three quarters of her size - and

that was just lying down!
If I'm this tall now, just wait till I'm older! I'll be the biggest warrior in all the four Clans of the Lake!
On further study, she had one quite white paw. It was not as harsh as the light that was blinding his eyesight now. Instead, it was such a boring, dull colour, he decided to describe it as a 'blank' kind of white. Now, his vision was a haze of blotchy bright dizzying shapes and movements. His stomach clenched. So much moving things! Thankfully, the stripy she-kit's blurry expression was unmoving, but Wheatkit was *sure* he caught a flash of something that older cats might call 'amazement'. Amazement at his size, perhaps?
"Featherkit, move! Let *me* see the runt!" A big scary dull-furred tom with a waving brown tail-tip shoved Featherkit out of the way, and Wheatkit recognised the deeper voice of Stormkit. Featherkit's fur rippled, but she slunk off to the left, her fiery scent disappearing. As she moved, a bright light pushed burning slants through the enclosed den and- Ow! Wheatkit wriggled backwards nearer Mother's softer heartbeat. The Light had bit him! Not appearing to see his terrible discomfort, Stormkit thrust his muzzle close (too close for Wheatkit's liking) until all he could see was a dull blob and smell stinky-breath. His slitted ovals widened as round as Mother's belly. "I've never seen eyes on a cat like *that* before! They're as blue as the sky!" So that was the colour surrounding the yellow Biting Light. Sky! Like Skykit!
"Yes, stunning," Russetdawn mewed behind him. Was she jealous of his eyes? Then Stormkit sat back on his haunches, whispering to Featherkit. Vision freed, Wheatkit's supposedly Sky-Blue eyes darted around, trying to pinpoint Russetdawn (crawling to Mother was much easier!). Round soft things that felt like moss rolled under his furiously kneading pawpads. Entwined brown and yellow walls spilling a rich reed and wood scent reared above the kits, patchy Biting Light and Blue Sky beyond. Outside scents (was that fish?) merged with nursery scents. What would the grumpiest CreekClan she-cat really look like?
"Try turning your head around, mouse-brain." Russetdawn sounded again, but this time, there was a definite improvement on the closeness of her voice. Trying to turn his head, he instead swivelled his ears around, and he was amazed at how many things his body could do when he tried. After a few more tries (along with a few impatient huffs from Russetdawn), he finally managed to get the

right muscle working. And so, as his vision sharpened further-
A few tail-lengths away, her reddish-brown fur was groomed to the utmost perfection, and a lashing, bushy tail scattered moss, making several kits squeal. She had a long grisly scar on one cheek and flank, and it looked almost exactly like what Russetdawn had explained in her stories (many times). She, however grumpy, was a warrior.
"Congratulations," She mewed, narrowing scary yellow eyes, "You have *successfully* managed to turn your head."
"Oh, you're just jealous, Russetdawn! I can still remember the day when you first tried to open your eyes, when I was a wee young apprentice!" croaked the elderly voice of Birchflower. She padded up to Russetdawn, and was a thinner patchy-and-white she-cat with dull paws. Birchflower nudged Russetdawn, giving Her a look. Wheatkit couldn't describe the emotion that he viewed.
"At least *I* knew the difference between my ears and my *head*!" Russetdawn snapped at the elderly queen. She wasn't happy about his eyes? Were they too Sky-Blue? Mother started lapping his fluffy kit-fur.
"I see you're as bad-tempered as ever, Russetdawn!" Birchflower chuckled, spreading out the scattered moss, "Don't forget - I *was* your mentor once, so I'm not afraid to give you a cuff 'round the ear, no matter what my age may be!"
Russetdawn flattened her ears, and a red tail lashed wilder. Birchflower spread the moss out again.
"But now since Wheatkit has opened his eyes, we can go outside and play!" piped up another patchy-and-white she-kit with moss-coloured eyes. Wheatkit almost thought that she was part of Birchflower's litter, until he heard her voice: Rosekit!
I think I'm lucky that her eyes aren't as scary as I imagined! Unlike Russetdawn's eyes.
"Don't forget to take Wheatkit with you," Mother mewed to Rosekit, soft-growling, "I know he'll want to explore now that he's opened his eyes."
"And such a beautiful blue they are, Mousefern," Birchflower added with a glance at Russetdawn, both pelts softly lit up by Biting Light. Wheatkit *mrrow*ed in agreement and looked in Mousefern's direction.
Mother looked stunning in his eyes.
Paler than Featherkit, silver sleek fur and a distinct orange nose-tip

glowed underneath Biting Light, finished with an eye colour much lighter than moss. Her rounded tail tickled his whiskers, and what was that soft emotion in her gaze? It made his paws tug. And knead moss faster.
"My beautiful kit..." was all he caught before Rosekit's sharp hiss dizzied him again.
"Who would want to play with *that* scrap of fur?!"
Mousefern went stiff stiff again, and her soft gaze snapped away from him. Then, two squeaks sang in unison, "Then we'll play with Wheatkit instead!"
As he turned, two three-moon-old tom-kits padded towards Wheatkit from near the tiny entrance, swishing their tails in greeting. The slightly smaller one was blank-furred, orange-brown eyes blazing excitedly against his ginger stripes, whilst the sturdier tom-kit's pelt was very rigid, very dull with lighter spots, and strange flecked, deep yellow eyes that studied Wheatkit. A lot.
"We can play fight outside the nursery, and see who is stronger!" challenged the blank tom-kit, Skykit, waggling his bottom, "Or, you can be bored to death with a camp tour from Pebblekit."
"Hey! Camp tours are *not* boring! You can learn a lot from experienced cats." Those deep yellow eyes compelled Wheatkit to agree. "And anyway, there's more chance of hurting someone when you play fight with them."
"Yeah, yeah," Skykit flicked his siblings' short tail, and was joined by Russetdawn's litter, "Why do you have to be so *weird* all the time?"
These kits are so kind to each other, Wheatkit mused.
"That's very nice of you." He turned back to Mother, now with Russetdawn sat beside her. Her lighter-than-moss eyes seemed to lack warmth. More serious. "But be sure to take him on a camp tour *only*. I don't want him getting hurt - he's only two moons old."
"We will, Mousefern." Pebblekit shot Skykit a really happy look, who stuck out his tongue. They somehow ended up scuffling with Rosekit and Featherkit. Russetdawn chuckled, but Birchflower sighed as more moss was scattered, Stormkit rolling in it for fun. Even Wheatkit had to twitch his whiskers.
"I'll watch the kits and escort them around camp." Russetdawn immediately stood up and padded forward, without any word of consent, and nudged the six kits towards the entrance of the nursery. Outside scents called Wheatkit. The chance of being free

from the confined nursery called the others.
Birchflower nudged Mousefern, her old rough fur brushing harshly against Wheatkit's soft pelt, "Ever thought of caring for two litters at once? Not me!" Mousefern moved her head up and down.
"If I can deal with *this* troublesome trio, I'm *certain* I can deal with three extras." Russetdawn cuffed Stormkit behind the ear as he stuck his tongue out at her. It appeared he was copying Skykit. Perhaps Wheatkit should stick out his tongue at Mother too?
"We can take care of ourselves, *Russetdawn*!" Stormkit crouched down and waved his tufted tail playfully, "And I bet us three can take you down in a fight!"
"Yeah! Feel our claws!" added Rosekit. Featherkit flexed her claws at this and hissed. Wheatkit brimmed with the shared anticipation like when he heard tales of mountain treks, grand battles and Gatherings. Such excitement!
"I bet you wouldn't stand a chance against *four* kits, Russetdawn!" growled Skykit, slashing his paw in a mock swipe. Birchflower watched curiously.
"I'd like to see you try! But Wheatkit has to learn walk first, right, Mousefern?"
Mother helped Wheatkit get the basic stance right, and showed him how to move his paws correctly. When she thought he was ready, she let him go, which ended in a complete disaster. Wheatkits' legs immediately buckled underneath him, even after practice. He waved out his paws wildly as he vainly tried to keep his balance. This only made it worse. He rolled over several times, until he crashed into some moss near Rosekit, leaving him upside down with his tail hanging over his head. Scents and colours blurred together. Was Russetdawn twitching her whiskers in amusement? She definitely snorted with satisfied pleasure, and left the nursery. Since he was too dazed to react, Mother helped him upright, lapping at his fur with worry. The rest of his denmates left in a tight circle, tails twitching, maws clamped to hide the laughter, oblivious to Wheatkit. Only Pebblekit and Featherkit paused before squeezing through the entrance. Wait. They had left without him? He scrabbled away from Mother's lapping, slipped between Birchflower's massive legs, dashed to the tiny hole that lead Outside. No cat would dare leave the mighty-
Ground! The ground is so colourful!
As chilly leaf-fall winds battered his kit-fur with fresh, *clean* air, and

Biting Light scorched him, multi-coloured jagged shapes skittered around and buried his, he noticed, oddly yellow-orangey legs. Right up to his belly! They made a harsh scraping sound if they touched each other, and crackled if he stepped on them. There were vast shades of deep-yellow, brown, ginger and red, all mixed in with squelchy peat. Were these leaves? A high yowl instinctively made him lift his muzzle.

Rearing over the camp like a badger, a hunched tree surrounded by drooping round branches waved underneath the Blue Sky. There, so close its rich scent spewed thick water into his mouth, was a black as shadows creature - as big as him. Wheatkit's belly flared, fascinated. He had never seen a creature with only two paws to stand on! Orange-rimmed, black eyes unblinking, wide tail twitching, it shifted nervously between green leaves, wrinkled hind paws scrit-scriting scratchmarks into thin brown bark.

Cats alive! What a beautiful creature! I think that yowl is from a, um....what prey did Birchflower bring back to the den that time? A, er...blackbird? No, no, no! That's not it! It was, uh...a snackbird! Yeah! A snackbird - that's the one!

Paws chilled from the squishy peat beneath him, Wheatkit attempted to yowl like the snackbird, but only managed a raspy whistling similar to Birchflower's snoring. On hearing this, the orange-mawed snackbird peered down at Wheatkit curiously, before yowling its song that sounded almost as fabulous as it looked. It was teaching him how to speak snackbird! How exciting! But then, with a flurry of its merged front paws, it took off and disappeared deeper into the tree.

Wheatkit dropped his gaze and tail to a dull pile of leaves, scattering them with harsh scrapes. *Don't go!* But only thin yellow-green leaves rippling and hissing above the trickle of nearby water answered him. Another potential playmate had left. He turned to plod back to Mother, when a gentle soft-growl and the scent of many plants washed over him. "Enjoying your first time outside, Wheatkit?"

He looked up. A brown and silver spotty *and* stripy she-cat looked down. Spiky green and yellow leaves nestled in her maw. Her leafy scent smelled familiar.

"I'm Birdsong, the Clan's medicine cat. I helped your mother while she was kitting you." Her mew was muffled, whiskers twitching. "That is, when you were born. Have your denmates told you what I

do?"
Tongue stuck in his mouth, and too in awe to speak, he moved his head up and down like Mother had.
"Great, because-"
"Birdsong!" A squeaky tom called, too far and blurry to see. His sharp scent wafted on the breeze, "Um, are you going to show me how to make a poultice for scratches?"
"Yes, coming, Eelpaw!" Birdsong swiftly worked into a trot towards the tom (her apprentice?), and her pointed stripy tail flicked Wheatkit's ear as she left. "If you get permission from Mousefern, I can show you poultices too, when I'm not busy. Go and have fun now, Wheatkit."
Learning about plants sounded boring, yet a nervous delight shivered in his ear tips where she had nudged them. He had a playmate whenever he wanted! He couldn't help but pounce on the leaves in triumph. When Birdsong moved away, he scented a non-moving snackbird nearby to his left, and looked left. It was held by a trotting light-silver stripy she-cat (How many silver stripeys were there in CreekClan?!) who was coated in even stranger Outside scents. She reached an exposed dip with a few small unmoving creatures, and put the prey (he assumed it could be eaten) down and started meowing to an far away huddling black cat. His hunched form was similar to Birchflower, and Wheatkit guessed he was an 'elder'.
The kit sighed. Who knew how far the camp stretched? To test this, with the droopy tree behind him, he attempted to focus further, to his right. He caught a glimpse of the hazy shapes of multi-coloured cats, Blue Sky, brown ground and the uncertain shivers of green plants before his eyes watered. He could, however, catch the many sounds of different creatures, the trickle of water, crackles of pawsteps on leaves and mewing of other cats. He was sure he caught his and his denmates' names being mentioned too.
Then *crash*! The ground was shaking again! Wheatkit squeaked, scrambled for safety underneath a scrub that scented of nursery and slammed his eyes shut admist the fierce crackling of leaves, paw-shaking thumps and kit squeals. Squeals?
"Take this, dirty MarshClan filth!"
"Ow, Rosekit!"
"Then defend yourself, Skykit."
"Catch me first!"

Cautious, Wheatkit opened his eyes and slid out from the scrub. White then patchy fur pelted past, followed by dull and silver, blowing him back with a fierce wind. Skykit and Russetdawn's litter. Phew! Wheatkit could breathe again. Russetdawn sauntered after them, chin high and red tail curled over her back. Her maw mewed at a pale dull she-cat who seemed healthy, yet was as thin as a grass blade. They left together. Neither acknowledged Wheatkit so it made sense he wouldn't acknowledge them either. Not that he wanted to after the nursery.

"I hate those kits!" Pebblekit's spiteful mew sounded close by as he cracked leaves with horribly loud paw-thumps. The dull-grey kit stopped a muzzle-length away, unsheathed paws scraping wet brown soil. Deep yellow eyes narrowed, he low-hissed, "I just hate it when Skykit goes off like that! He doesn't even say goodbye to me; I bet he doesn't even *care* about me anymore! Just because I like being 'smart'! Plus, he's following those stupid, good-for-nothing kits now too! Ugh. You know what? I don't care what Mousefern says. Just to prove my point to Skykit, we're going to play fight, okay? For I'm better than he ever will be!"

Wheatkit immediately used the 'move his head up and down' technique again, fur burning with alarm at Pebblekit's ferocity. He didn't want to hear anymore. Not like he understood any of it.

"All right. I know you haven't fought before, but I want to see if your natural talent is at fighting."

Wheatkit was highly unsure that his 'natural talent' was at fighting. But he *was* quite tall, so wouldn't that give him a distinct advantage over all his enemies?

"Attack me!" Pebblekit challenged.

He promptly sprang up and leaped towards Pebblekit, pink mouth open, pretending to be one of the fierce MarshClan warriors that Rosekit had described. But Wheatkit misaimed his jump, and Pebblekit neatly dodged to one side, flailing his paws weirdly out at him. Wheatkit was confused as to what he was doing, but realised a second later, as he smacked muzzle-first into the peaty ground below him. Sticky mud clogged his nose and its ugly scent itched his throat with thirst.

Shaking his fur, he stood up, spat out mud and growled playfully to Pebblekit, when he noticed Russetdawn and a group of blurry blurry cats were pointing their tails at him. Their confusing scents mingled with mud, their sneers echoing in Wheatkit's ear fur.

Frozen, his stomach felt like it was spewing out of his body as he realised what had happened. He was the deputies' son, and within short pawsteps of exploring the big big world, his Clanmates were laugh laughing at him. Not just casually laughing, but real laughing. The spiteful, mean kind of laughing.
"The mouse-brained moron!" Russetdawn was jeering, tail-lengths away. None of his other Clanmates seemed to notice as the group sneered in agreement:
"Yeah, the stupid idiot!"
Were they trying to encourage him to play?
"I've never seen a Clan kit so unskilled!"
But he had made a playmate of Birdsong, hadn't he?
"He's as useless as a fox that's been dead for a moon!"
Did they realise he had never seen a fox before?
"More like two!"
Did they want him to feel this way? Confused and hurt?
"Make that three!"
Couldn't they see they were hurting him?
Then to his dismay, he witnessed Pebblekit rolling in the sand, oblivious to everything else:
"Pffft! You were so awesome back there- Wait, Wheatkit! Where are you going? It was only a little joke!"
Did they even care?
Reeds tearing out clumps of his fur, Wheatkit raced into the nursery, crashing into his mother's belly. He quietly mewled into her soft fur:
"Mother? Why won't some cats accept me?"

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What's wrong with the world, mama
People livin' like they ain't got no mamas,
I think the whole world addicted to the drama,
Only attracted to things that'll bring you trauma.

But if you only have love for your own race,
Then you only leave space to discriminate,
And to discriminate only generates hate,
And when you hate then you're bound to get irate, yeah.

Madness is what you demonstrate,
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And that's exactly how anger works and operates,
Man, you gotta have love just to set it straight,
Take control of your mind and meditate,
Let your soul gravitate to the love, y'all, y'all.

People killin', people dyin',
Children hurt and you hear them cryin',
Can you practise what you preach?
And would you turn the other cheek?

Father, Father, Father help us,
Send some guidance from above,
'Cause people got me, got me questionin',
Where is the love?

Where's The Love - Black Eyed Peas

2 Regretful Memories

[image]

Last Updated: 9 July 2017

The picture you see above (by me) expresses how much Mousefern cherishes Wheatkit. (Inspiration taken from Mizu-no-Akira's warrior cat drawings!) At the end of this chapter you may understand why. Or, I wonder, will it leave you with more questions?

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The silver, dark-flecked she-cat was surprised by Wheatkit's sudden appearance in the nursery. She was even more surprised when he started to say his first words in a mumble. But, her fur quickly prickled with dread as he cried the hateful things she had hoped he would never, *ever* have to hear. "Sssh, Wheatkit! It's going to be all right!" she comforted desperately.
"No!" His blue, blue eyes bled pain like a fresh wound. "I'm the deputies' son, and I made myself look like a mouse-coward out there! Yeah. A mouse-coward. That's what they think."
"W-Wheatkit!" Mousefern was taken aback, and glad Birchflower was dozing, "They wouldn't think that!" An old tom's sigh rang in her ears: Young kits are easily influenced.
"Yes they do, Russetdawn and those blurry shapes!"
Russetdawn? Mousefern suppressed the fierce love that flared inside her. If she let it control her, she would impulsively accuse Russetdawn in front of her Clanmates, with little evidence.
But...resolution surged inside her. Wheatkit was part of the Clan as any cat. So why should he be shunned at such a young age? Kithood was the time of joy and prosperity, not fear and loneliness.
The answer was obvious.
Russetdawn had spilled the Secret.
Fury burned inside Mousefern. How dare she! After the Clan been through so much already... But if she hadn't broken that...
Hurtful images of the past flashed before her, but she shoved them away. Grief struck like a claw, but she couldn't let her emotions get
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the better of her. Breathe, Mousefern, explain this to Wheatkit slowly, gradually. He can't cope otherwise.
"My precious," she whispered, "There's something you shouldn't know about. I don't know why I'm even mentioning it, because if you uncovered anything at all, our lives will be in danger. All of us in danger. You in danger. Perhaps I am turning kittypet-brained. Am naive. Or just love so much that it-"
Innocent blue eyes stared like vast sky. "Mother? What are you talking about?"
Pain stung the burdened mother. He wasn't ready. She would have to wait. More cats would have to-
"Nothing?" Comfort came out as a feeble question of distraction. "My rambling will make sense when you're older. And we can find those nasty cats afterwards and report them to Hawkstar, how about it? Quiet now, the others are returning..."
His trembling had stopped, and now Wheatkit rested. He buried his sweet muzzle into the protection of her belly, suckling. His fierce new emotions projected pain onto the young queen, but she didn't mind. His pain was her pain. His life hers. Their bond never broken. Mother and kit.

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In a way, it's a shame,
All you were once fades away,
On the hour,
Dreadful hour,
Fate has no sympathy.

For survival,
You turn your heart away from the pain of memory.
Lost in the past,
In vain I grasp,
And I grasp.

Though nothing lasts,
Still I'm unable to let go of that eerie melody,
I can hear but never sing.

Time's lament,
For things we can't forget,
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In a way it's okay.

All you were once fades away,
On the hour,
Dreadful hour,
Regretful,
Painful,
Memory...

Memory - Books On Fate

3 The First Victim

Last Updated: February 19 2018

After leaving kit supervision with Dewfeather, Russetdawn padded swiftly after Wheatkit as he scampered into the nursery, past Pebblekit. A few moments later, she heard an almost inaudible cry of rage and sorrow. Curious, she crouched down and parted a few branches of wood that bordered the CreekClan nursery. A sharp twinge of pain erupted from her paw; a loose splinter had lodged itself in one of her grey pawpads. She roughly yanked it out, and spat out a few spatters of blood.
"Fish-brains!" she cursed, licking her pawpad clean. Great. Now she would have to lecture Blueripple about thorough splinter-checks for the dens. No cat liked such acts, neither did Russetdawn, but *someone* had to ensure kit safety. What if it had been Rosekit? Stormkit? Paw throbbing, she then peered through the tiny crack she had made, listened intently to what the cats inside were saying. Only there wasn't any conversations to listen to. The nursery had been plunged into silence.
All because of a splinter, I have no idea whether they Knew.
Hissing in frustration, Russetdawn stalked inside the nursery, tail lashing stray reed fronds. As soon as she stomped in, Wheatkits' head shot up from Mousefern's belly. The yellow sop of sorrow expressed a dull, angry emotion. "Oh. It's *Her*." So he started to talk, huh?
Russetdawn narrowed her yellow eyes and growled back. "It's *Him*." His blue eyes avoided her gaze after that.
"Anyway," she mewed slyly, prodding Wheatkit several times in the back, "Why aren't you next, *next* to Mousefern, Wheatie? Come on, get closer to her. She's your *loving* mother!"
"Don't call me that," He mewled, a perfect opening. Time for Russetdawn to prepare him.
"Why not?" She prodded Him a bit harder this time.
"Russetdawn. I would stop if I were you." Mousefern leered.
The red queen ignored her as Wheatkit gaped his tiny pink mouth, "Because I don't want you to!"

"No cat said that this was about what anyone wanted to do. Therefore, I shall continue."
She promptly jabbed one sharp, unsheathed claw at Wheatkit and he let out a squeal of pain. Russetdawn flicked her tail, successful. Now he should counter attack instinctively, as Stormkit would. But as expected, Mousefern snarled viciously and flipped Russetdawn onto her back. The red she-cat allowed herself to be pinned down harshly; despite Mousefern's sweet, shy appearance, she could be a ferocious fighter when she wanted to be. Aching bruises from apprenticehood were remembered.
"Leave my kit alone, you cruel piece of fox-dung! If you do that again, I won't be afraid to claw your liver out!" the silver cat growled.
"Harsh as always, Mousefern," Russetdawn trilled, "Say, do you remember 'bloody season'? The time when countless cats got hurt by our 'secrets'? Unless you want more word to spread out, it would be wise to release me, yes?"
Heh. This should get her.
As expected, Mousefern's green eyes grew wide with shock, "How dare you bring that up, crow-"
Her reply was cut off by a sharp hiss from Birchflower. Both of the she-cats glanced at the other queen.
"Russetdawn, even though you are a senior warrior of the Clan, you have *no* right to be hurting a kit as young as Wheatkit. You're lucky because of *that* I won't be reporting you," Her aged mentor towered above Russetdawn, gave her a hard stare. Rock hard. "As my past apprentice, I am *appalled* at your behaviour. No wonder your kits are so disobedient! Hawkstar would **not** be proud. It states in the warrior code that you should *never* hurt a kit as young as six moons old. Wheatkit is only two. There is a *big* difference there, Russetdawn."
"I didn't physically injure him. He just felt a small pain, that's all," Russetdawn pointed out, watching Wheatkit huddle closer to Birchflower, "He needs to learn how to defend himself."
"He's not an apprentice yet!" Mousefern spat, sending droplets of saliva all over her muzzle. Disgusting.
"Russetdawn!" Whiskers twitched on Birchflower's graying muzzle, "How can you say such a thing?"
"It's not my fault *He* is an attraction for problems." Russetdawn flicked her ear casually. A breeze whipped through her fur from the

entrance. "Can't you see what I'm doing might save his life one day?"
"You show no respect for *anycat,* do you, Russetdawn?" Mousefern continued, her tail bristling with anger. Yes, ignoring Russetdawn's, however unruly, but simple logic. There is a moral in the cruelest of deeds, her mother once told her. She burned in BirchClan forests, abandoned by family.
"*Correction,*" Russetdawn bared her fangs, temper flashing, "I show no respect for any cat that I feel doesn't *deserve* any respect."
Mousefern glared at her with an odd look, and slowly retracted her paws from Russetdawn's throat. She turned around and rested her tail on Wheatkits' shoulder before leading him outside. "I'm not wasting my time on an *atrocious* cat like you! If you *dare* go near my Wheatkit again, I swear by StarClan, I will slice you open myself!"
"Fine by me," Russetdawn replied, indifferent. "I would do the same for my own kin..." she added in a murmur. She licked her chest fur as a swelling love almost overcame her thoughts of her kits, and Hawkstar. Her lifeblood. Loving family that couldn't replace the memory her mother's traitorous ones.
Grandmother... And the fact that no cat survived nightcough. Over the moons, it had affected her, she knew, that constant worry for a queens' kits. It felt like when she couldn't feel the ground while swimming. It trapped her in all its itchy, pressing thorns. Perhaps that was why she had such a bad-temper. At least she didn't moon over past losses like Mousefern.
"So," she purred, "you aren't going report me, Birchflower? Why? No need to give a response. I think us queens know the answer to *that* question."

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The bristling she-cat ignored the biting chill of the outside, thoughts buzzing like a bee hive. *That vile little-! How **dare** she say those things about Wheatkit! I should have questioned her there and then!*
Leaves crunched under her paws whereas Wheatkit had to drag himself through them. She butted his rear to help him wobble through a drift, cautious with paw placement. (Mousefern always worried they were too large and would squash him). His dainty kit-fur was dotted with marsh. She licked it off. It was bitter. Her sweet kit then huddled underneath her, nudging her teat for milk.

Mousefern could already feel weight gushing into her belly.
"Return home, Mother! I'm hungry!"
"We are home, my precious," she soothed, skirting past Pebblekit batting at a willow frond, "Just in the middle of it. Now where are those nasty cats-"
An anguished wail tore her question to scraps. Mothpetal, near the entrance of camp! Her dappled pelt was unkempt, copper eyes on slits. Reeds shivered beside her. "B-brother?" she horrified.
Moonclaw stiffened at the fresh-kill pile, fur on end. Tail-lowered Icetalon gave Mothpetal comforting licks on her ears, as a gesture of reassurance. Why?
Because slumped in front of the two grieving warriors, was the frail body of the deputy.

No!

She scampered over to the fallen cat, Wheatkit hobbling to catch up. Fox-coloured fur was intact, but the rest drained the fire in her paws. A stream of dry, sticky blood was plastered over his gaping jaw, mixed in with yellow-green pus. His yellow eyes were wide-open and he was randomly twitching, even though obviously dead. Regardless, Mousefern plunged her muzzle into her mate's fur and wailed, "Why, StarClan?"

Time slowed. Icetalon froze.

"Father!" Wheatkit chirped in amusement, poking Foxmuzzle's glazed eyes, "Why are you smelly and laying? Stand and soft-growl to me! I can talk now!"
Grief and pain gripped her like the chilly bite of leaf-bare.
"Wheatkit..."
"Haha, your whiskers tickle my- achoo!"

He couldn't be dead.

"Wheatkit, please..." Mousefern shuddered. How could she tell her kit without breaking his heart?
"Father!' Wheatkit's tail slapped the ground, "Wake up!"
Yes, wake. Foxmuzzle was just unconscious, right? He would wake up any second. He would lick her nose-tip, remind her they were still young. She wanted to feel the reassuring brush of his fur,

wished for the soothe his humorous rumble gave-
But Foxmuzzle didn't have a humorous rumble. Nor was he young.

*Yes, at least **he** isn't dead...*

Guilt and anger seared her ear fur, scorched them hot. What kind of Clanmate was she, feeling *good* at another's death? Her anger burned like wildfire as the wave of relief kept sloshing at the fire. Foxmuzzle was her CreekClan mate! She should feel nothing for-
"Mother? Why won't Father talk to me?" Her precious kit was whimpering, hazy eyes a blossom of uncertainty. A fierce love spread like rain over the fire in her belly. It made her usher Wheatkit closer to Foxmuzzle. He didn't deserve such pain so young, but she would tell him-
At once Icetalon grabbed the scruff of her neck and hauled her back swiftly, his white pelt bristling with fear. She screeched in fury. Mousefern automatically swiped an unsheathed paw at him, which he barely managed to dodge. He released his grip as he growled, "Why are you letting a kit catch nightcough?!"
The distraught she-cat fought back a sob, "Can't you see we're grieving? Or don't you care that your Clanmate is dead?"
At her last word, solemn-eyed warriors peeked out of their dens. Apprentices halted mid-spar. Kits paused from their happy games. Curiosity and puzzlement tainted their deadened eyes. *What's going on?* their gazes asked.
"No, Mousefern! I do care! It's just... he..." Icetalon stammered, brown eyes pained despite a rigid stance.
"He what?!"
Patchy clouds feasted on the sun.
"I found his body in the middle of a small pool by the lake. And," he paused, "it was before sunhigh."

"Nightcough."

Icetalon nodded at the soil. "Now no cat can go near his body for long, or they will get infected too."
A lonely wail rose from Mothpetal. Silence clawed it away.
"See if I care!" Mousefern took a defiant plod toward her mate.
"What's wrong?" Wheatkit's mewl was ignored amidst the chaos of emotions hurtling about the four cats.
"This is what it is. And we have to accept that." Mothpetal's short

tail strained to comfort Mousefern's shoulder, only to be swatted away.
"So you just give up?" Mousefern hissed, "Foxmuzzle was my Clanmate, my mate! I owe him too much, Mothpetal, and you want me to forget him?"
Copper slits bubbled with hurt, grief, panic all at once. Fear scent coated the golden warrior. "Mousefern, what would happen to Wheatkit if you died too? Do you think the Clan would be able to care for a kit like him? I'm not insulting him and can only do so much, emotional as I am. Think. He *needs* your support, Mousefern, and you know it!"
She *knew* it? Mousefern reckoned Mothpetal was giving her two choices: Die and go StarClan and be with Foxmuzzle forever, but leave dear Wheatkit alone? Or stay alive and help Wheatkit through his troubles but grieve for Foxmuzzle until StarClan came for her? Pah! There was always more than one choice, yet Mothpetal was too grieved to realize it. Mousefern would show her this, but not now. Not in front of precious Wheatkit.
"There's no point rousing an argument. Just leave," she muttered, half to herself. She did not meet Mothpetal's hurt gaze, but instead looked down at her offspring. "I'll stay with you, Wheatkit. Until StarClan calls me."
"StarClan?" Wheatkit squelched between paws, cold from the marshy soil, "Isn't that where dead prey goes?"
"And where cats go, my kit. Foxmuzzle is watching us from StarClan now," she murmured. Birds chirped their agreement.
Wheatkit shook his head. "Then where are the Star Cats?"
Icetalon lifted his muzzle to a patchy sky, then to the soil. "In the sky, though, there are tales of them coming to ground."
"Yes, Icetalon." Mousefern lowered her ears slightly at Mothpetal still lingering on the edges of her vision. Neither Icetalon or Wheatkit noticed the change, "I hear they are almost invisible, star-pawed and have such a tranquil scent of air and water."
The tom-kit shook his yellow head harder, even more confused. "I can't see them."
Mothpetal stared at Wheatkit, tail drooping. "They will come when they need to, young kin."
"I don't understand!"
Mousefern didn't think he ever have the time to. "It's okay, come here, Wheatkit." Mousefern ignored Mothpetal. "Icetalon, may I...?"

The warriors nodded in understanding, Mothpetal slower. They skirted towards Moonclaw who questioned them with curiosity. Within a moment his silver-striped maw dropped, then scampered towards the warriors den, naive to what heartbreak his words would cause. Apprentices and kits flocked around him, Hawkfeather leading the way. Mousefern knew the whole camp would know about Foxmuzzle before sunset, the point just above where Mothpetal and Icetalon were feeding. Littlestone then caught her eye, gray fur flecked with grayer pity. Guilt snapped her gaze away, down to Wheatkit's even guilter ones.
"Why did those warriors leave? Did I say something bad?"
"No, I sent them away; we need a little peace here. Alone."
She then lay down near the twitching corpse. She was some distance away so she wouldn't get infected, but close enough so that she could grieve. Suddenly, a yowl of surprise shook her from behind. Confident pawsteps bounded towards the mother and kit. Almost shaken out of her fur, Mousefern turned round.
"Great StarClan! What's this I hear about nightcough?" A deep, commanding voice rang out across the clearing, making Russetdawn's kits squeal with joy. Yes, the news spread quicker than she thought. Mousefern glanced up to find the brown-pelted leader, Hawkstar. His round ears were sternly pointed forward, though his dark blue eyes were distraught. Mousefern couldn't help but wonder if he was feeling the same pain she was now; he and Foxmuzzle had been close friends after all. But most likely not. *He* didn't have any guilt about a cat that was alive.
"My mate, the Clan deputy, died alone from nightcough by drinking from a pool of water before sunhigh. Icetalon found him dead by the lakeside," she mewed flatly.
Icetalon nodded from the dwindling fresh-kill pile, "Yes. I carried him back to camp so the Clan could mourn."
"I see," Hawkstar lashed his tail and suddenly turned on the senior warrior, "But you *do* know that placing a dead, infected body in the middle of camp *does* pose a major threat to the rest of the Clan? Don't forget we haven't found a cure for nightcough yet."
The white tom padded to Foxmuzzle. "I understand that, Hawkstar. I just thought that the Clan would like to see the evidence in front of them, rather than not at all."
"Well, they don't need to be infected while they do so; they can verbally hear about it from their Clanmates instead. I don't want

any sick kits or apprentices at the moment! Leaf-bare will be here in half a season, and CreekClan must remain at the top!"
"So you want me to bury his body out of camp?" Icetalon shifted his paws.
"That would be convenient," Russetdawn sarcastic meow came, again, from behind Mousefern. Her trailing kits gave him a look that teased 'Yep. You go do that'. Despite their teasing tones, their eyes were clouded with grief.
"Will do," he mumbled, cautiously pulling Foxmuzzle towards the reed-infested entrance. Mousefern winced as slick mud slid over her mate's body. She didn't follow, for fear of losing herself to her sorrow. Once, elders had participated in Clan burials. Now they simply watched from afar.
"I wonder how Wheatkit will react when I tell him his father's dead," Mousefern murmured to herself.
Overhearing this, Russetdawn opinionated, "In his current state, I wouldn't be surprised if he didn't understand the concept of death."
Mousefern started to glare at Russetdawn, then she saw that she didn't have a smirk, grin or smile on her face. It was simply *blank*. Not that Russetdawn showed much of her emotions anyway. Mousefern shrugged, seeing that Russetdawn wasn't out to be mean for once.
She observed the camp, sighing as cats gathered patrols under Hawkstar's orders, Birdsong showing Eelpaw herbs, Willowpaw and Pouncepaw continued teasing kits with dung scented of moss, much to Dewfeather's embarrassment. Being normal. They had already seen and heard of too many cats or kin that had died from nightcough. It pained her to see that they were forcing themselves to appear used to death, when it was clear from their body language all this death was weighing them down.
She nuzzled Wheatkit, who now dozed, pink mouth gaped, in a shaft of sunlight broken by willow branches. Motherly green eyes followed dying leaves stirred by a dainty breeze, detached from their once fruit-rich trees. It was as if the world was quietly grieving for Foxmuzzle too.

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The cats roll by, the Clan knows by, the sound of the wails.
And I'm losin' sleep by just tryin to keep my head afloat.
~~~~

Higher and higher and higher we build,
We'll stop when all the holes been filled,
The first victim of a war is truth.

Don't you worry about yourselves,
Lay the blame on someone else,
Don't you ever look too high,
But at the level of your eye.

Yellow bulldozer, a roller coaster, of broken dreams and shattered pines.
Fatherless children, an Armageddon, of children's hopes and dreams.
And our leader, torn to pieces, tell me, could you do better than him?
The first victim of a war is truth.

First Victim - Daisy Haze

4 Remembrance Day

Last Updated: 9 July 2017

"Wheatkit? Are you awake in the nursery? I have something important to tell you," Mother roused him softly, there was a patter of paws, and soon he felt a rough tongue lapping his head fur. Her voice was low, strange. "Wheatkit?"
The nursery? Memories of exploring camp, mean cats, Father asleep, and a confusing argument until he napped flashed in his mind. Perhaps the snackbird had told Mother to carry him back inside. His Blue-Sky eyes, still droopy, shut and the World went dark for a heartbeat before he could focus on brightly lit Mother. He still couldn't get used to this 'blinking'. "Have you found those blurry cats yet?"
"No, but it's about Foxmuzzle."
"What about Father? Is he going to soft-growl to me now?" His whiskers tingled as he hobbled upright, "I want to show him the snackbird!"
Mother curled her tail around his shoulders. "I think you mean blackbird, my dear kit. But Foxmuzzle won't be able to see it."
"Why's that? Is he going to fight the HillClan invasion?"
"What? Ah, you mean what Birchflower said earlier," Mother wrapped her muzzle around his neck, voice cracking like reeds. Her smooth fur brushed his, heartbeat thumped, thumped inside his ear, "Oh, he's dead, Wheatkit. I don't want to believe Foxmuzzle's dead!"
Dead? What was Dead? "Is it like Blue Sky or Outside? Or like StarClan with their Star Cats?"
"No! It's an forever sleep which he will never wake up from, you silly kit!" she exploded a whisker-length away, moss-coloured eyes slitted like grass blades. His ears rang. Startled, Wheatkit sprang away from her, trembling on tiptoe. Paws burning, he buried himself in moss, scrambling away from Mother's scary scary anger, until he scented safe safe Birchflower behind him. He hid in the darkest corner of her belly. He had only asked!
"Mousefern..." Birchflower rumbled, having heard the whole conversation, "Would you like some time alone? The kits are still

playing outside."
Mother didn't seem to hear. "Wheatkit, I'm sorry. But Foxmuzzle's gone forever. It's my fault, I should have gone with Icetalon!" She looked very sad and Wheatkit's paws were still burning.
"Mother, are you sure-"
"It's my fault!" Her fierce gaze focused on Wheatkit. It was like Pebblekit studying him again. Certain and unflinching. His fur shivered despite the stuffy air. "Ever since Ivyleaf's kit died over a moon ago, I knew that fox-hearted nightcough would find CreekClan!"
"Do you mean the MarshClan deputy's son?" Birchflower asked, barky scent fluctuating wildly. Her voice was cracked too. In response, Mother flicked moss with her tail-tip, gaze down. It barely rolled kittensteps.
"Yes. I mean him. What was his name again? Rockkit? Greykit?
"Stonekit."
"Yes, that was it. But who will be next, I wonder?" Mother dragged her paws forward, Biting Light making her silver fur glow from the entrance behind her. Wheatkit flinched away. Mother wasn't still angry, was she? "Not my Wheatkit, I hope."
"No cat knows. It could be any one of us." Wheatkit's belly twisted like a branch at Birchflower's words, "And no medicine cat has found a suitable cure, or at least a *prevention* for it yet."
"Unless a mean, stupid idiot **does** know a cure for it, and wants the whole lake to suffer first!" spat Russetdawn, slipping inside the nursery. As She blocked the Biting Light, Wheatkit's face cooled and could see Her back arched in the dark shadow. "Foxmuzzle was a worthy deputy! How can we lose him now, half a season before leaf-bare?"
The three cats nodded in agreement. Understanding little, Wheatkit could only knead his paws on rough moss, uncertain. Would he Dead next? Or Mother? A chill ran through his body. *How am I supposed to Dead from a thing I can't see?*
"Hawkstar has almost finished sorting tomorrow's patrols." Biting Light made Wheatkit squint as Russetdawn left. "Expect a meeting soon."
"Meeting? I want to go!" Wheatkit squeaked, his heart suddenly bright and light like the Blue Sky. He didn't notice Mother and Birchflower giving each other a knowing glance. As if on cue, a deep yowl came from the other side of camp:

"Let all cats old enough to swim gather here underneath the Fallen Oak for a Clan meeting! We have a very important matter to discuss!"
Wheatkit's fur fluffed up with delight. He pushed the confusing image of Dead Father to the back of his mind, and sprang out of the nursery. Moss clung to his fur, only to be trampled along with leaves by his furious paws.
My first Clan meeting! On my first day Outside too!
The Biting Moss was rolling low in the sky now, and the shadows in the camp became longer and much more safe to hide in, like Birchflower's belly had been. Even the burn in his paws drove him to them. Somehow his Blue Sky eyes adapt to the weird, dark colours of black, orange and similar shades of late mossset. And how far he could see! Wheatkit could tell even when he was dazed from dashing so fast. Then a curly stick blocked him, so he tried to stop. But Wheatkit only tripped over the stick, tumbling into cold wet ground. Yellow-rimmed leaves flew towards an orange sky. Squeaking, he shook marsh from his fur, to see a huge Russetdawn staring down, whiskers twitching. "Sorry, little Wheatie. No kits allowed at Clan meetings!"
"It's my first-"
"Nursery. Now. Goodbye." Russetdawn crackled leaves underneath her paws, padded off towards the gathering cats. He sighed. *Why is She so mean to **me**?*
Trudging back to the nursery's reed entrance, he sat down, testing how his paws unsheathed near a shrub. Strange creatures hooted and called outside camp but *they* didn't care about him. Not after the snackbird. Then he sensed Mother above him, "Ignore Russetdawn, Wheatkit. Come, you can sit with me by the other cats."
His mood lifted instantly. Wheatkit trotted after Mother as all kinds of different cats shuffled to find the best spots, mewling greetings to each other, Mother and him. Wheatkit felt his belly twist as huge warriors peered at him curiously. Others were gazing up at Hawkstar; a long-furred brown stripy version of Stormkit, in front of the Biting Moss, so his shadow cast over CreekClan. Wheatkit was in awe for a moment but he thought Mother looked better.
The shuffling cats included were stripeys, patchies, large cats, small cats, thick cats, thin cats and many more inbetween. How could one Clan be so diverse? His denmates were sitting happily in the middle

of the towering cats, unnerved as if they were warriors themselves. He was glad he had come to the meeting: if those kits could go, he could too! Russetdawn couldn't control him forever! However, his belly churned when he looked at them, so he sat with Mother on the outskirts.
"CreekClan, I hearby announce a tragic event," Hawkstar's bellow rumbled inside Wheatkit, "As most of you know, Foxmuzzle passed away from nightcough. His body was found by Icetalon next to a small pool of water by the lakeside. Our hardworking deputy seemed so determined to provide for CreekClan, he pushed himself the ultimate edge. So far in fact, he gave into his needs, and as a result, died."
Low murmurs arose from the Clan like a trickle of water. Mother curled her tail around Wheatkit as Hawkstar continued, "But his spirit watches from StarClan as we speak and listen. Therefore, as respect for one of the hardest working cats this Clan has ever seen, my senior warriors and I have discussed a new tradition for all the generations of CreekClan that may precede us. From now on in every leaf-fall, the night before the second Gathering, we shall spend a few silent moments remembering all of the brave cats who died for us, young or old. It has been named 'Remembrance Day'. Does CreekClan agree with this proposal?"
The cats mewed a sad, "Yes" and Wheatkit noticed unmoving specks of white moss in the purple sky. The Biting Moss had gone. His ears pricked, heart bubbling like when he had seen the snackbird. He felt dizzy for a moment.
"Good. Otherwise, I would've fed you to those fierce kittypets down at the Twolegplace," Hawkstar added as the Clan gasped in shock, "Hahaha, just kidding. Now we may begin."
The Clan let out a small chuckle, reassured by Hawkstar's strange humour. And so the cats sat as still as trees. Wheatkit was alarmed as the clearing was plunged into an eerie silence. The night creatures made not a sound (except chirping and trickling water which seemed to be everywhere), even the wind seemed to drop a little. Was this supposed to happen?
He pressed against silent Mother, against her warm fur and constant breath that made small puffs of white. It faded into the chilly air. Wet marsh still made his rump cold. As more white specks glistened above Wheatkit, he raised his maw, studying them, in strange awe. His paws tugged.

Father? Are you up there now? With StarClan, dead prey and Star Cats?
He suddenly felt very cold, but sensed a large object to his right. He turned to see a star-pawed, semi-transparent shape of a tom cat. His sparkling fur was red-orange like leaves and his yellow eyes brimmed with an uncertain calm. He scented of air and water. Father.
"Wheatkit," he greeted.
"A-Are you a Star Cat now?" Wheatkit mewled in a whisper, scared what would happen if he spoke too loud. His pelt burned with tree-lengths of questions he wanted to ask this cat he assumed was from StarClan.
The tom blinked once. "Yes. I hate to, but let's skip the greetings; you must know something important."
"Tell me!" No cat had ever trusted Wheatkit with an important thing before. And it was only for him!
"Whatever you may find when you're older, just remember."
"Remember what? Rememberance Day?" Wheatkit squeaked. Father brushed his whiskers with his tail, like Mother had.
"Whatever happens, the path you tread is your own."

~

Birds chirped his eyes awake. Wheatkit felt the humid but cosy atmosphere of the dark nursery. A round Silver Moss shone in the lower gaps of the reed den. Mother was curled up beside him, with her head directly in his line of sight. With Foxmuzzle's sharp, airy scent still scentable, Mother's muskier scent was almost too much. She stirred, and yawned slightly, her eyes red. She shook her head and noticed that Wheatkit was awake.
"Wheatkit?" she soft-growled, "What are you doing up so early?"
"I- Huh? Where's Father?" Wheatkit whispered, rising up. "He was just here!" Mother stared at him.
"Foxmuzzle? Your father's dead, Wheatkit, and his body was buried yesterday."
"But I was outside!" he mewed frantically, "With Foxmuzzle right next to me when Hawkstar told us to be silent!"
Mother blinked a few times and chuckled, "It all must've been a dream. You *did* fall asleep whilst every one was quiet; you were almost stumbling over your own paws when I carried you back to the nursery!"

Wheatkit shook his head, half listening, and murmured. "But it all seemed so rea-"
"Back to bed, Wheatkit. We have a big day tomorrow. We're going outside of camp, and Hawkstar is going to choose the cats for the Gathering." She settled her head back down onto her paws and closed her eyes again.
There's more *to explore?* Wheatkit's heart leaped with joy. *The sooner I sleep, the sooner I can go even further outside!*

~

This little child; there's no fear in Her eyes.
Could She not show respect for other dads who have died?
Take two minutes, would you mind?
It's a pittance of time.

God forgive me for wanting to strike him.
My heart pounds in my breast,
Fingers pressed to my lips,
My throat wants to fall out,
My tongue barely resists.
But two minutes I will bide.

Read the letters and poems of the heroes at home.
They have casualties, battles, and fears of their own.
There's a price to be paid if you go, if you stay.
Freedom's fought for and won in numerous ways.
It takes courage to fight in your own war.
It takes courage to fight someone else's war.

Take two minutes, would you mind?
In peace may they rest,
Lest we forget why they died,
Take a pittance of time.

Pittance of Time - Terry Kelly

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Hello. :)
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What, it's been a whole two years since I wrote this, and I'm glad I've edited it.

Editing this chapter has got me thinking lately.

Perhaps one day the world will be a, not perfect, but better place.

5 Lost and Found

Last Updated: 9 July 2017

"Cats of CreekClan, gather here underneath the Fallen Oak for a special meeting!" Mousefern opened her green eyes slowly and yawned. Whilst gazing at the almost full moon that was quite high in the dark night sky, she mewed, exasperated, "What does Hawkstar want now?"
"Have you forgotten that the new deputy must be chosen before moonhigh?" Russetdawn answered icily.
Oh. The new deputy. Her thoughts were flattened, discouraged by Russetdawn's uninterested tone and fresh grief that pierced her heart, made her tail sag. Mousefern's eyes were starting to adjust to the night light, and she saw that the russet-red she-cat was already up and halfway through washing her face. She felt the usual tense prickle as she studied Russetdawn.
"Yes. Of course I remember," she replied, in the same icy tone Russetdawn had used, "I just prefer not to think about the past."
"Certainly. It must be very hurtful to see your precious mate disappear from you." Russetdawn mocked a fake sad tone.
"And I'm sure you would feel the same way if Hawkstar were to disappear from you." Mousefern did not rise to Russetdawn's sensitive prod.
Russetdawn scowled at her, and Mousefern was sure she caught a flash of uncertainty in her eyes. Without another word, Russetdawn slinked out of the nursery, and headed towards the Fallen Oak.
She heard Birchflower stir behind her and she croaked, "Russetdawn was a right old troublemaker when she was younger, and I think it is best just to take no notice."
"Thanks, Birchflower," Mousefern replied, "It's nice to have an elder's word of advice."
"For once!" Birchflower swished her tail passively, and the two she-cats padded out of the nursery, being careful not to wake any of the sleeping kits.
They walked towards the Fallen Oak together, and they sat next to Dewfeather, an aging pale grey she-cat with green eyes that never

failed a smile. Mousefern flicked her ear as the two old she-cats instantly started chattering about some elderly nonsense. She instead nudged Dewfeather's second oldest son, a coal-black tom, "Hello, Sootwhisker."
He swiftly turned his broad head, and twitched his distinct jet-black whiskers in greeting, "Hey, Mousefern. How is Wheatkit doing?"
"Sleeping," she purred in amused affection. Seeing Sootwhisker's amber eyes light up with humour, she added, "That's all what kits do these days - sleep, play, eat, play and sleep again!"
He chuckled, "I'd do anything to go back to those days - wouldn't have to move a paw!"
"Pfft. If I was your mother, I would make you run to the edge of the territory and back, just for your fresh-kill!" she joked.
Sootwhisker pretended to shudder with fear, almost knocking shoulders with Streamsplash, who yawned. "Good thing you aren't."
"Well, if I was your mother, you wouldn't even want to leave the nursery," chuckled Russetdawn behind them.
"Great StarClan, no!" Sootwhisker now put on a face on which the young ones would call... 'derpy'. "And hello, Russetdawn," he added, flicking his tail respectfully to the senior warrior.
"Greetings." She sat down on his other side, obviously away from Mousefern. "Now, what were we discussing yesterday about prey...?"
Mousefern's silver fur bristled with annoyance. Once again, Russetdawn had ruined her mood and her conversation. She sighed, frustrated, and she was thankful that Hawkstar had chosen this moment to yowl again, "Quiet down! Quiet down!"
The out-of-tune nattering that sounded like fledglings on a warm new-leaf day dropped to low murmur. Then, as the last few talkative cats started to lax in their conversations, Hawkstar began, "CreekClan, it is time to announce the new deputy. But first, we have a new warrior to add to our Clan."
Hawkstar looked down towards the centre of the assembled cats, but Mousefern didn't know who he was looking at.
"Icetalon. You have trained Pouncepaw for many moons now, and his ceremony is long over due. Do you think he's ready to become a warrior?"
Icetalon blinked, and his eyes sparked with bewilderment and surprise. Pouncepaw, on the other hand, looked on eagerly with his grey eyes centered on Hawkstar.

"Yes." Icetalon quickly sat up straight and put on an authoritative tone of voice, as all heads turned towards him. "He has trained so hard these past few moons. I have not seen such talent and skill in seasons."
Hawkstar nodded, and Pouncepaw's eyes gleamed with excitement as Hawkstar meowed, "Pouncepaw. Step forward, please."
Pouncepaw instantly bounded forward, into the small clearing just in front of the crowd. He held his tail high as Hawkstar jumped down too, raised his muzzle to the sky, and spoke the ancient words of the warrior ceremony.
"I, Hawkstar, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on this apprentice. He has trained hard to understand the ways of your noble code, and I commend him to you as a warrior in his turn. Pouncepaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and protect the Clan, even at the cost of your life?"
"I do," Pouncepaw meowed boldly.
"Then, by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior name. Pouncepaw, from this moment on, you will be known as Pounceprey. StarClan honors your talented hunting skills and your determination to defend the Clan. We welcome you as a full warrior of CreekClan."
Hawkstar placed his head on top of the black and white tom's shoulder, and Pounceprey respectfully licked his shoulder in return. The new warrior's body trembled with excitement. The Clan chanted 'Pounceprey!' several times and Mousefern bathed in the blissful memory of her own warrior ceremony. Yes, such bliss. But those days were gone. *Wheatkit is my priority, even if he will be without a father...* She shook her head and forced herself to cheer for Pounceprey. He was now in front of Icetalon, chin high and tail curled. His mentor's eyes were gleaming proudly.
"Congratulations, little brother..." Sootwhisker breathed beside Mousefern. She remembered that Dewfeather also had two other sons as well as Pounceprey and Sootwhisker: Reedfang and Nightpaw. Their father was Scarface, a frail elder now, but Mousefern saw him yowl with his Clanmates as if he were still a warrior. She broke out of her thoughts as she heard silence, then Hawkstar conducting another ceremony on the Fallen Oak - the deputy!
"I say these words before StarClan, and before the spirit of our fallen deputy. May the ancient cats of StarClan hear, and approve,

of my choice. The new deputy of CreekClan will be..."
Mousefern twitched her ears as she realised that the normal ceremony words had been changed ever so slightly. But then, Foxmuzzle had been acknowledged in it so she didn't mind as much.
"...Reedfang!"
This time, the other cats waited until Hawkstar had uttered the last syllable, before they burst out, "Pounceprey! Reedfang! Pounceprey! Reedfang!"
Reedfang had the same baffled look as Icetalon, but he managed to declare proudly, "Hawkstar, I accept the honorable rank of being a faithful deputy to the Clan. I hearby promise to stand by CreekClan until I go to StarClan."
Hawkstar nodded. "Thank you, Reedfang." He waved his tail at the Clan. "Since all of you look so eager to congratulate, the meeting is dismissed."
Over half the Clan streamed around Pounceprey and Reedfang. She wanted to give her own words of congratulations, but she was too sleepy after the day's events. Her groaning paws confirmed this. She padded back to the nursery, and curled up next to Wheatkit, who slept like a rabbit. Besides his snoring.

~

"Mother, Mother, Mother!" Wheatkit whispered, shaking Mother's still body, "It's just after dawn! Can we go outside camp now? Please!"
His Mother was frustratingly slow to wake up and rise to a sitting position. She luxuriously stretched her limbs and glanced at Wheatkit. He recognised the signal for amusement but couldn't say exactly what triggered the thought.
"Yes, we can go now, Wheatkit. Right after you've got ready."
"But I want to go now! I don't need food, a wash or anything else!" His belly felt it would burst if he stayed inside any longer.
"A warrior eats prey to keep his strength up." Russetdawn was also stretching, but watching a dizzy Featherkit tease her littermates. "How can you defend the Clan if you don't have the energy to do so?" She flicked Her bushy tail and padded out of the nursery, with her kits following behind closely, mewling.
Featherkit gave him a look, and flicked her left ear at him. It was

funny how she never actually spoke, but her strange gestures were almost as comforting as if she was speaking. Well, at least one kit didn't laugh at him. Gazing at the motionless, sleeping bodies of Birchflower and her kits, Wheatkit mumbled, "Okay. We can try my first fish or something then."
Mousefern sighed and closed her mossy eyes. "You know we can't eat or drink until sunhigh, Wheatkit..."
"...because of nightcough," he finished, feeling a strange hole claw his insides.
"But you may as well become acquainted with where the Clan gathers at mealtime," she mewed, opening her eyes to the Biting Light-lit entrance, "Don't eat any of the prey, okay?"
"Yeah." The fresh-kill pile? That was no way to start an adventure! He swished his tail in annoyance as Mother trotted slow slowly across the waking camp (Wheatkit could now focus farther and began to recognize some some of the stripeys and thin cats from yesterday). The Biting Moss rolled lazily between the droopy tree branches, warming Wheatkit's chilly kit-fur, whereas his dirty paws sank into squelchy marsh and leaves. He glanced up at the Blue Sky. It was dotted with blank Grass Clumps. Birds called to each other above the fast roar of water, as Mother padded to a large patch of grass. As he opened his maw, chilly air attacked his mouth but he could smell non-moving prey scent in the area. Tall stems poked out of the squishy, springy marsh. Wheatkit tilted his head. Where was all the prey?
In answer, Mother chuckled and scraped a few brown leaves out of the middle section. They crackled in protest. In front of his wide eyes revealed prey in a shallow dip. Wheatkit squeaked in surprise. The hole was dark, and when his stuck his nose into it, it was tickled by round sticks and prey scent. There was mostly watery fish; a few huge soily-scented rabbits (that were bigger than Wheatkit!); slimy frogs that reeked of mouldy trees, but there was one piece that intrigued him; a large brown mouse with a watery yet barky scent.
Mother said I can't eat the prey. But she didn't say I couldn't touch it!
Wheatkit reached out slowly with one paw to test what the large brown mouse felt like, when a white paw hooked it from him with ease. Wheatkit bared his fierce tiny teeth in protest. "That's mine!"
Neck fur rippling, a black apprentice sneered with the large mouse swinging from his jaws, "What? Never seen a water vole before?"

The tom swung his head towards a wide tree hollow, where a silver small cat bowled over a bigger brown-and-white patchy. The apprentices' den? But before he could tread more than a fox-length away, Mother hissed:
"Nightpaw! Come back here now! You can't eat before sunhigh."
'Nightpaw' immediately dropped the 'water vole' behind the pile and blinked his dark blue eyes at Mother. His fur bristled. "I've been night hunting since the deputy ceremony. I'm starving."
Leaves cracked underneath Mother's unsheathed paws. Wheatkit gulped, stuck in the middle and unsure what to do. There was her angry angry scent again, as stiff as a tree. Nothing dainty about it.
"Foxmuzzle was dehydrated. Do you want to end up like him?"
Nightpaw drew his lashing tail back. "But...this water vole, it's from the fresh-kill pile! It won't be infected then."
Mother's voice cracked, a seething, desperate scent radiating from her, like when she had seen Dead Father. "Can you really be so sure?" The apprentice dropped his maw towards the water vole when-
"Nightpaw, don't touch that!" A jet-black warrior, his deep orange eyes burning so angrily, and sharp yowl so fierce, it made Wheatkit squeak and squeak and spin squeak and spin round squeak and spin round n squeak and spin round in fright. Alert on tiptoe, Wheatkit saw the rest of the Clan focusing their attention on the scene. He pressed closer to Mother, heart racing, who slipped her paw over his shoulder. Then the black warrior threw the water vole back onto the pile. "What do you think you're doing? Are you trying to die!?"
Nightpaw froze, tail lashing again while Mother flinched. He watched the vole slump on top of a rabbit, "Of course not, Reedfang! I was hungry after training so hard last night. Remember?"
"I remember."
"Then let me eat."
"It's not sunhigh yet, Nightpaw."
"I know! Stop correcting everything I do!"
Reedfang glanced sideways, shifting paws. Immediately his voice went quiet and sharp. "...Go and check if the elders need anything."
"No! Ever since Hawkstar made you the new deputy-" Reedfang's eyes looked straight down at Nightpaw, halting him, before taking another furtive side glance. Nightpaw followed it. Their Clanmates' silent, watching eyes stared back. There was a low-hiss from

Nightpaw, "So you're worried about what the Clan thinks of you, huh?"
Then a strange expression wrinkled then widened Nightpaw's face. Oddly, Wheatkit's belly crumpled like leaves when Pebblekit had laughed at him. What was this feeling called? Then, when Nightpaw's fur bristled and he stepped forward, Reedfang shifted his paws furiously, head thrust higher awkwardly. What was he trying to accomplish by holding his head up? "Nightpaw, please-"
"I thought we were brothers!"
Wheatkit flinched. Brother? Mother started to tug Wheatkit backwards. Silence clawed CreekClan's maws. Reedfang shook, snapped his head away from his littermate. "W-We are." He quickly regained a steady gaze to Nightpaw, who stared back, eyes narrowed, "But the ranks of the Clan divide us now."
Mother wrapped her gentle tail around Wheatkit, leading him away from the confrontation and staring cats. Mothpetal, drawn in for some reason, lingered close by, but distracted herself when Mousefern glared at her. Wheatkit barely noticed either. Stumbling awkwardly, he was stunned by so many confusing words and angry angry scents!
Behind him, he heard Reedfang's voice shaking, "Go. Now." Marsh squelched nervously. "I'm sorry."
"Mouse-tails to your apology!" Leaves snapped and cracked as sharply as sticks as Nightpaw's hiss faded, "I thought you cared about your family. But I was wrong!"
Wheatkit shivered. Nightpaw's words trembled in his ear fur. Mother lapped his head. "...Let's go and meet the other warriors, Wheatkit," she mewed, "I'm sure they'll be delighted to see you." Perhaps she was right.
After scampering a lot of pawsteps, his limited vision focused on one spotty blue and another orange cat, furs bright against a brown stick-den. Warriors! He shook away the unsettle in his growling belly. (Perhaps he should have had suckled first, Wheatkit pondered.) Oh well! His whiskers tingled as the cats (who scented of that sweeter she-cat scent; toms were more musty) focused on him for a heartbeat. Wheatkit forced his leaf-ridden paws to go faster than walking Mother, aiming to introduce himself first. He would show them what a warrior he could be! If he could make a playmate of the medicine cat, he could do anything!
"Bluerippple?" The orange she-cat was mewing, "You're great at

understanding cats; what was Nightpaw 'wrong' about?"
Mother slowed down. Wheatkit halted too. Was he going too fast? Why did they mention Nightpaw?
"You're still young, Squirrelfur." 'Blueripple' flicked a fly from her ear, "Reedfang has always been self-conscious about his reputation-"
Then Mother jerked left, making Wheatkit squeak, to another stick den (Why were the dens made of sticks anyway?). It looked like the nursery but had reeds entwined, not on the outside. Three cats lay underneath a big big dull rock; a tom and two more she-cats. It was the brown-and-white patchy and silver small cat from the apprentices den (the silver was a stripy, he realised). And also, Wheatkit's nose twitched, his playmate, Birdsong! (She seemed to be everywhere by this point.)
"Hello Mudsplash, Willowpaw and Birdsong," Mousefern waved her tail at them, "Mind if Wheatkit and I sit here?"
"...any MarshClan a paw-step over the border, I would tear- Oh, hey, Mousefern! And sure, feel free to sit wherever you like!" The patchy tom nodded at Mother, who began resting on her belly. Wheatkit sat beside her. (It was really cool in the shade, not hot!).
Then immediately the silver stripy, (Willowpaw it seemed by her smaller size), scattered leaves in her mad dash to loom in his face. Apprentices were even bigger than he- "So you finally came out, Wheatkit! Hi!!" Woah! He sprang back in fright, heart pounding. She was so loud it exploded his ears!
"Willowpaw, sit down! You're scaring Wheatkit." Mother repeatedly cuffed Willowpaw's pouting face when she protested, while Mudsplash snorted softly.
"Leave her, Mousefern." His tail flicked a drooping branch, lazy. Birdsong chuckled. He added, "Someday Willowpaw will scare the wrong cat. Then she'll stop."
Mother hesitated, and Willowpaw scrambled at once to Birdsong's side. Then Mother twined around Wheatkit, belly fur warm on his back, paws cracking a few leaves as she settled. He sighed and sat, the fire in his paws fading. No more scary yowls! But, he cringed, when would Mother stop saving him? It helped, yet... Then he noticed Mudsplash's dark blue eyes resting on him. Really big dark blue eyes. "So, this is the brave warrior Birdsong's been telling me about."
Wheatkit's heart bounced like a nervous snackbird. "No, er, yes, I am that fearless, brave warrior! Actually, I saw a snackbird today.

Er, it's black and has strange merged paws and, yeah, I wasn't scared!" He paused, ear tips burning, to see the four much bigger cats watching him closely, Mother especially. This was his moment! So why did he feel so clumsy? "And also, I battled a whole horde of rats! Yeah, they were bigger than Hawkstar!" He puffed out his chest to affirm this.
"Wonderful," Birdsong soft-growled to his right, stripy tail ruffling his back fur, "I'm sure they'll never challenge this fierce warrior again." The others mewed agreement as wind whispered in the sparse trees cast over them. Willowpaw opened her maw, but was stopped by Mudsplash on her left. Was she about to comment on his bravery? Nevertheless, warmth and excitement rippled beneath Wheatkit's fur. Finally, cats believed in him! Warriors too!
Then Mother said, "Wheatkit, turn around." He did. His tail was twitching furiously. As Mudsplash mewed to the she-cats, Mother paused to quickly nuzzle his ear, "See? I told you they'd be delighted." When Wheatkit looked up, her mossy eyes had a soft gaze. The one, he remembered, that made his paws tug.
Then Mudsplash's laugh broke their gaze. Mother looked left as Mudsplash meowed, "Mousefern, you should stay and hear this-"
"Thank you, but I was thinking of taking Wheatkit outside of camp today," Mother soft-growled, lapped Wheatkit's tingling ear tips, "My brave warrior needs his Clanmates to join him in his adventures."
Wheatkit gaped his maw in protest. She forgot he was an independent, brave warrior! "I don't need anycat!"
"Oh, Mudsplash would love to go, right, big brother?" Birdsong mewed over him. She tapped Mudsplash with a paw. Big brother? An image of Nightpaw's hurt expression pulsed in his mind. Was that a type of littermate?
"Mudsplash says maybe."
"Maybe means yes, furball."
"No, it does not!"
"Does too!"
Wheatkit watched the two curiously. His tail twitched. They seemed to be angry, but their scent hadn't changed at all. And now they were laughing as Willowpaw mocked their argument. Unsure, he nudged Mother. "Why are they laughing? They were arguing, weren't they?"
Mother soft-growled. "This is a joking argument. A banter. They

pretend to argue for fun so it's like a game." Her fur went stiff stiff for a moment. "However, they don't mean to hurt each other, unlike...never mind. Do you understand?" Her soft gaze returned. Wheatkit wasn't sure who the last sentence referred to, but nodded anyway. A banter. A banter was funny.
"I'm afraid I can't come, dear brother," Birdsong was meowing, "I promised Eelpaw I would help him treat Streamsplash's and Honeypaw's whitecough today."
Wheatkit scrunched up the grass he was playing with.
"White...cough?"
Birdsong nodded. "It's a disease that makes you feel really bad, but not as bad as greencough, blackcough or nightcou-"
A squeaky yowl choked out of Mother. Wheatkit jumped. "Mother?"
"Foxmuzzle died from nightcough." Mother's eyes were shut. Her scent was stiff again.
Wheatkit slowly pawed her whiskers. "Um, yeah, what about Dead Father?"
Mother then Birdsong then Mudsplash then Willowpaw bristled. It was like they were frozen. Claws tore more holes in Wheatkit's insides. He had said something wrong again! He shuddered. Would the warriors reject him like Russetdawn and those blurry cats? He shrank against the marshy ground.
Unexpectedly, Birdsong brushed her tail along his flank and Wheatkit felt a bit better. "Hush, Wheatkit. I'm really sorry...Mousefern." She padded next to Mother's ear. Her voice dropped to the lowest low-hiss. "Know that the Clan grieves for Foxmuzzle even though they continue living." And then, on very long legs, she skittered to a grassy patch next to the warriors den, glanced back, then disappeared down a hole. The medicine den? Perhaps he could visit there later...
"So, you're going outside of camp with Wheatkit, Mousefern?" Willowpaw mewed abruptly, "Can I come?!"
Mudsplash rose to his paws. "Perhaps traveling with a kit will teach her to slow down."
Mother opened her eyes. Wheatkit and Willowpaw nervously hopped on tiptoe. Mother's maw twitched. "Perhaps."
"YAY!" yowled Willowpaw, almost blowing the tom-kit off his paws with her leap (it was tree-lengths!). She landed clumsily on a odd patchy of reeds. He was a bit confused, as Mother hadn't directly said "yes", but by Willowpaw's excitement, she probably was

coming. And despite the dizzy echoing in his head, Wheatkit saw many heads turn their way.
"Willowpaw, calm down!" Mudsplash meowed, his thick scent bouncing, "Stop acting like a kit! You're an apprentice now! Maybe you can learn a thing or two about responsibility. You can be in charge of Wheatkit and show him around nearby."
Rather than accepting this as a punishment, Willowpaw meowed, "Oh yeah, come on, Wheatkit!"
Wheatkit nodded. "So, where to first?"

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Biting Light nibbled Wheatkit's fur as he panted underneath the shade of a young droopy tree. The Outside-scented breeze blurred Mother's and Mudsplash's nearby scents. The camp was nowhere in sight. "Willowpaw, I don't need help getting over this boulder!" He puffed out his chest. Then glanced at the boulder three tail lengths high. His fur raised. "Really! I don't!"
Willowpaw glanced at the Biting Moss glaring through colorful tree branches. "It's a rock and Mousefern told me to show you around until you're tired, and I am." Her head butted his, so he faced the boulder. "So go for it."
This was his chance! But his paws were clumsy again like before..."I was, uh, already going to!" He bounded forward, heart trembling, and jumped up the boulder. He slid down. Nevertheless, he tried again. He slid down. "Moss-brains!" He unsheathed his paws then climbed. He slid down...slowly. Wheatkit sheathed his paws then climbed. He slid down fast. He slapped his tail on leaves, forcing them to whirl skyhigh in loops. Why couldn't he climb?! Paws stinging from the rough texture, he saw Willowpaw not watching. He lashed his tiny tail again. Climbing was important to becoming a warrior! Why wasn't she watching him? His pelt burned, and not from Biting Light, he thought.
He opened his maw to call out then saw she was distracted by massive shiny leaping creatures. *Fish*! Real smelly fish! Gazing at their paw-less bodies darting here there underneath the nearby stream (so that was where the trickling noise came from), for a moment, he watched Willowpaw smack her paw into the water, scattering the fish and spraying Biting Light-lit droplets and plunging her muzzle where they swam to. An unmoving fish

already lay underneath her hind paw, in-between reeds. So that was fishing?
Wheatkit wondered whether he should tell Willowpaw "help me climb". His back fur felt hot again so he shook himself lightly, attempting to shake off the heat like moss. He was a warrior, right? Warriors could do anything. Anything. Even scare an apprentice.
Wheatkits' belly filled, flared with an excited tingle. What an idea! So, he crept behind her. He crept slowly-slowly... placing hind paws the same place as the first...his twitching tail low near the ground...It felt, normal. Natural. The strange word stuck to his mind like moss. Is that what this feeling was? Natural? Like moss? And was Mother watching him hunt? His mind sharpened like a claw with that thought. Tension in his hindquarters, he stared for a moment at Willowpaw's swaying tail. Ready, and... "WILLOWPAW!"
"Yrreow!"
Willowpaw's tail slapped Wheatkit away really really hard as she spun tree-lengths into the air then Wheatkit was on the ground then the world went dark then dust filled his throat so he coughed then he heard something like a belly smack back onto the ground like Mother plopping onto moss but louder then Wheatkit suddenly felt frightened that he had hurt somecat or Mother was watching then-
Then he saw Willowpaw flat on her belly.
Wheatkit stopped.
Is that her talent? Jumping, then landing clumsy?
The thought blurred while crackling leaves looped skyhigh, Wheatkit's cheek burned and his paws scuffled to maintain balance. He felt a little stunned.
Free, the unmoving fish suddenly wriggled furiously, smacking its way into the stream with a ker-plop. Wheatkit squeaked.
Willowpaw groaned. "No, no!" she spat, sliding over the now empty reeds hilariously before standing up. "Now Mudsplash will be mad at me and the Clan won't have any prey for sunhigh!"
Wheatkit felt like his paws were draining and his head stung, tingled like when he accidentally (accidentally) rubbed his head on dry moss to try it. He shrank. "Sorry, sorry! But, er, you can always catch more, of course. Um...and you deserve it, as you failed to watch me! You're not doing what a real warrior should-"
Crack! Paws unsheathed. More reeds snapped. Willowpaw's back fur spiked like a bush. "'What a real warrior should', huh? Then *what* should a warrior do?"

Belly churning, Wheatkit felt hot underneath Willowpaw's gaze. But isn't this what he wanted? Attention? "Um..."
"Did Russetdawn paw your brain with her influence?" she continued, padding closer.
By Russetdawn...Wheatkit had been 'influence'? That sentence sounded wrong. "Influence?" he mewled. The word melted on his tongue, "What's that?"
Willowpaw's silver head snapped downwards, the colour paled in a transparent shaft of Biting Moss. Her face filled Wheatkit's vision. She stirred loose pebbles with her tail. He stiffened. "Look at that."
"What?"
"You're still a kit."
Wheatkit glanced behind him. Fluffy pale gold fur. Small grey paws. Tiny pointed tail. Yes, he was a kit. Not warrior size... "For now!" He bopped her nose so fiercely and so fast she leaped backwards in shock. Then halted. She blinked, still. A deep deep gush streamed through Wheatkit's paws. He could take an apprentice by surprise! Twice!
Tail fluffing with energy, he mewed, "Now watch me climb this boulder!"
"Wheat-"
"I can do this!"
Almost flying like a snackbird, he dashed, scrambled, bounded over the grey smoothness, too much! For a heartbeat, a flare came upon him, like when he saw the fish. For a heartbeat, he imagined falling, struggling in the mighty stream below him...he snapped his eyes closed. Moments flowed between the erratic heaving of his breath, fur bristling, claws aching. Warmth seeped into his marsh-cold pawpads. Silence. Then only water trickled and birds sang. He dared to open his eyes.
From up here...
...the whole World was beneath him!
Mind whirling at his height, several blurry shapes of small fish darted underneath the stream below. He tried to focus on one there- there- then there- Woah! Fur-flattening wind! It was Willowpaw, scrambling up beside him. Her stripy rugged tail swished. "Didn't think you could climb, Wheatkit."
Hardly listening, Wheatkit belly churned. He wanted a rock to himself! "I'm going to that even bigger one!"
"Huh-"

As he leaped, he missed, and suddenly tumbled down down a wet decline, dizzy, then his back was cold and soaked and there was creatures shrieking and somewhere there were yowls, from Willowpaw, from Mother- Yow! Bouncing up and down, Wheatkit's belly burned from sharp things forcing squeaks out of him and battering his small body. Throat dry, he tried to wail for Mother-it was okay for a warrior to call for help, right? Yak! Dirt, grainy and foul, poured into his mouth. Then he was facing up, where boulders and cats were getting smaller... Mother... Safety... Climbing...
Then *thump*! His eyes snapped shut for a moment, pawpads detecting something soft. Wheatkit spat out a few rough pebbles that had somehow made it in his mouth, and was starting to shake dust from his pelt when he felt the ground shaking. *Cats alive?* He then flexed his paws and found it wasn't soily grass underneath it, but soft fur!
Looking down nervously, Wheatkit saw a scary-looking apprentice glaring up at him with blazing amber eyes. He was a black tom with a white underbelly, muzzle and paws. He reeked of something bad. Wheatkit then suddenly remembered a small piece of advice Russetdawn had gave him.
"If you ever see a cat with a horrid scent of crowfood and swamps, that's a MarshClan cat. Best advice? Run."
If that scent MarshClan, danger! Wheatkit tried to make his legs move, but they were stuck to the very spot he was standing. His legs stiffened up, and he gulped slowly, tense. The black tom didn't look happy. Pushing a squeaking Wheatkit off of his belly, the tom hissed in a deep, scratchy voice, "You stupid kit! What are you doing so far from your camp?"
"I-I, uh, was sort of, um, going to this c-clearing thing with a, er, an apprentice, and I kinda fell down this, erm, hill, and, um, I-" Wheatkit stuttered, pressing his body down to the floor, trying to make himself as small as possible. He could smell his own fear-scent, and the rage of the other tom towering over him. His paws yearned for a warm nest to rest his aching paws.
"Great! Another interruption to our conversation! What next? A CreekClan patrol?" snarled a small, slender black she-cat near the MarshClan apprentice. She lashed her white-tipped tail angrily and she spoke in a cold, but smooth, crisp tone of voice.
Wheatkit had hoped that since she smelled like a loner, she would pity him more, but judging by her tone and bristling fur, he didn't

expect much from her. Fearing the worst, Wheatkit pinned himself closer to the ground, hoping they wouldn't attack him - he was protected by the Warrior Code, right?
Then, as if on cue, he heard a familiar voice behind him, "A CreekClan patrol, eh? If you count one suspicious warrior, a curious apprentice and an angry queen, you could say it was a patrol, yes."
Out behind a patch of ferns came Mudsplash, Willowpaw and, and... Mother! (How did they get here so fast?). He immediately rushed to her side and wriggled underneath her furious licks, heart welling with joy.
Then the black she-cat blinked fearfully at the CreekClan patrol and Wheatkit barely caught her mumble, "Sorrel...worry...horse". She then scampered into the undergrowth behind her, trampling twigs and leaves in her wake.
Willowpaw started to pad after the loner, but Mudsplash blocked her with his tail.
"Leave her, Willowpaw. She's only a loner so she won't be much of a threat. But this MarshClan apprentice-" Mudsplash flicked his tail towards the apprentice, "-will be. Do you care to tell me who you are and why you're in the middle of CreekClan territory?"
"I'm Poisonpaw, and I ain't telling you anything!" The black tom hissed to Mudsplash.
"Don't push it, Poisonpaw; we're already in trouble! There's no need to make it worse!" A light brown she-kit with silver-blue paws popped from a bush. She looked about the same age as Wheatkit but she was scrawny, half-starved and her sapphire-blue eyes were round and big. Really big.
"Quiet, Gorge! I've got this situation covered!" Poisonpaw hissed, lashing his tail.
"Gorge?" Mousefern echoed, staring at the light brown she-kit with interest. "What's a two moon old kit doing out in the forest at this time of year?"
Poisonpaw shrugged. "Why don't you ask her?"
"Perhaps we will. At our camp." Mudsplash added, "And you are coming with us, Poisonpaw. Can't have you running off without an explanation." (Wheatkit couldn't help but *mrrow* at that. His Clanmates were dealing with this situation so well!). With that, he set off with Mousefern on one side of the two cats, whilst Mudsplash walked on the other. This left Wheatkit and Willowpaw to take up the front.

"I think this is going to be quite a tricky situation, if you ask me," Willowpaw murmured in Wheatkit's ear and he answered with a solemn nod. He had no idea what she meant.
The two intruders stayed silent for the whole journey, only casting a few glances along the way. Soon the familiar reedy entrance came into view, and Wheatkit couldn't help but trot a little faster. Home!
Inside, Poisonpaw was greeted with hostile stares, but he spat back nonetheless. One of the elders muttered darkly.
"Willowpaw, take Wheatkit back to the nursery and then go on a hunting patrol or something, since it's almost sunhigh. This situation is for warriors only," Mousefern ordered them, looking over her shoulder.
Willowpaw nodded, and Wheatkit immediately dragged himself into the nursery and went for the first nest he saw. Birchflower's. The old queen gently licked him on the head affectionately, but Wheatkit felt no pleasure. He was asleep before he hit the moss.

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The brown, white-patched tom padded with the three other cats towards the small, moss-covered cave that made up the leader's den. It had a distinct, round shape that perfectly disguised it as just a large boulder. But he knew that just to the side of it, where a large patch of ferns hid, was a sharp crack that could only be seen from the rocky ridge above camp.
"Hawkstar! Are you in there?" Mudsplash called in his deep, stern voice, trying to detect some movement at the entrance.
He better be...
"Come in." Hawkstar mewed from inside the cave.
Mudsplash gestured for Mousefern to take up the rear of the two intruders, and they padded inside. It was unexpectedly large from the inside, and the ground had a soft texture, due to all of the moss that had been strewn around the stony floor. Hawkstar was grooming his long-haired fur, which required quite a lot of attention. He tensed up as he saw the strangers that had come along in the patrol.
"Who are these enemy cats that have dared entered our camp?" he hissed to Mudsplash.
"Talk about a warm welcome..." muttered Poisonpaw to Gorge, who just stared at Hawkstar *with wide eyes.*

Pfft. What else do you expect? All the prey you can eat and a moss-covered path to lead the way?'
"This young MarshClan apprentice, apparently known as Poisonpaw, was found arguing with a black she-cat with a white-tipped tail. They were found by Wheatkit at the bottom of the hill by the Sandy Clearing, where he took a tumble trying a climb a rock. He's fine." The CreekClan cats suppressed a chuckle of amusement at hearing Wheatkit's antics. "The she-cat instantly disappeared as soon we came, but I would not consider her a major threat at this time. Then, this she-kit, Gorge, was found there too. She may have been the cause of the argument."
Hawkstar nodded all the way through Mudsplash's intuitive explanation, and then meowed, "MarshClan, did you say? What would MarshClan, or by extension, Viperstar, want with loners or our territory?"
"That's what we're trying to find out, Hawkstar," Mousefern meowed, "But Gorge won't say anything, and I'm not even going to start with Poisonpaw."
You can say that again.
"It would be risky to send an apprentice so close to the next Gathering. Maybe Viperstar intended to provoke us?" Hawkstar meowed, "He has been dropping quite a few hints lately. Extra patrols, more and more cats hunting closer to our border..."
"That may be it Hawkstar! Viperstar might be trying to take our territory. Again. But then, what's the point of sending an apprentice to CreekClan if he does nothing but walk around?" Mousefern looked thoughtful.
"Good point." Mudsplash agreed.
"I'm right here, you know!" Poisonpaw hissed, "I did more than walk around!"
"Then would you care to explain what you were doing on our territory?" Mudsplash shot back. The apprentice stuck out his tongue in reply.
"I will expect Viperstar to answer that tonight, even though that is highly unlikely." Hawkstar swished his tail. "Mousefern, will you be able to ask one of the queens to take care of Gorge while this business is taken care of?"
"I can care for Gorge myself, if you wish. I only have Wheatkit to deal with, but Russetdawn has three troublesome kits, and I don't think Birchflower can keep up with two kits, let alone three..." she

meowed gently.
"T-that would be good. You seem awfully nice, Mousefern." Gorge mewed in a sweet, tiny voice. Mudsplash knew Gorge was a kit, but wasn't allowing a stranger stay inside the camp dangerous?
"Why wouldn't I be?" Mousefern purred. Contrary to his suspicious thoughts, Mudsplash had a feeling that they would be good friends when they were older, just by looking at them now.
"But, Gorge-" Poisonpaw protested quietly. He stopped as Mudsplash glared at him. Gorge's attention was too captured by Mousefern to hear his small cry. It was as if she had forgotten the whole event that morning.
"Well then, that's sorted," Hawkstar meowed. "Mudsplash, take another warrior with you, and escort Poisonpaw back to the MarshClan border immediately. We will not receive any information out of him, and I wish to speak with Viperstar personally. I will talk with Reedfang to step up MarshClan patrols to ensure he does not return." He focused on the apprentice for a moment, then nodded to Mousefern as she turned to leave with Gorge. "I will also announce the new kit's arrival shortly. You are all dismissed."
"Affirmative," Mudsplash guided Poisonpaw out of the leader's den. He knew that keeping Poisonpaw in the CreekClan camp would just heighten the risk, as the apprentice would know the Clan's habits. It was a massive advantage when preparing battle tactics. He then meowed to him, "Come on now, Viperstar must be missing you."
"Hrrm," was all that came out of him. Poisonpaw looked grumpy, tired...a little something else too. He kept glancing at Gorge, who was being escorted away from the curious eyes of his Clanmates. Regret, maybe?
Mudsplash shrugged this off, still a bit suspicious. He quickly scanned the area for a warrior to help him before his Clanmates similarly surrounded him with questions. He called to Blueripple, who was grooming herself beside the fresh-kill pile, "Hey, Blueripple! Will you escort this intruder with me to MarshClan? Hawkstar's orders."
The blue-grey she-cat turned her head around, and studied Poisonpaw with thoughtful ice-blue eyes. "...Sure. We can hunt on the way back, if we hurry."
"Well then, let's get going!" Poisonpaw complained, "I want to go home!"

The pair stared at him.
"Oh, I thought you were eager to walk around our territory a bit more," Mudsplash teased.
The 'paw grumbled in reply.

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I know you left me standing there,
Out of the calm of the coldest air.
I don't believe the words you said,
But I can't find the words I want,
Oh, I can't find the words I want.

If you were gone in another life,
I don't believe I would just survive.
I could feel you next to me,
An escape from the world I'm in,
Oh, I'm afraid of the world I'm in.

One day I will see Heaven's reach,
I'll find the one who left me sleeping.
Every war was another seed,
That could feed every soul in need,
Oh, I'm worn by the war in me.

Somebody found me here,
Somebody held my breath,
Somebody saved me from the world you left.

If you're gonna cry my tears,
If you're gonna hold my breath,
If you're gonna let me see the sun you set.
Oh, I am lost and found,
Oh, I am lost and found...

Lost And Found - Katie Herzig

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I wrote around 6800 words in this chapter! Record~

NEWS FLASH: Poisonpurr. A cat so deadly that just its purr can kill

you.

Just a thought. :)

6 Fateful Decisions

Last Updated: July 9 2017

"Right. Dewfeather, for tomorrow's dawn patrol, you can check MarshClan with..." Reedfang hesitated, black pelt twitching underneath the cool, expectant stares of the senior warriors. Which cats would find the most information without crossing borders or starting a fight? "Russetdawn, Mudsplash and Pounceprey."
Russetdawn, Icetalon and Dewfeather shared glances, nodded with approval. Elation, with a twinge of nervousness, surged through Reedfang's belly. *I chose the right warriors!* The sun, low in the sky, suddenly felt cool on his dark pelt, which was dappled orange by the whispering branches of the elderly willow. It made sense, as the patrol had a senior's wisdom, a witness's knowledge, and a young warrior's curiosity. Still, it felt strange directing cats older than him.
"Good choice, Reedfang. You seem to have a natural talent at making orders," Icetalon chuckled.
"Well, um...every cat is special in their own special way." Reedfang pawed at his white nose-tip, cringing at the dumb words. He had to sound more like a leader!
"Let all cats old enough to swim gather here underneath the Fallen Oak for a Clan meeting!"
A meeting? Again? Why? Reedfang blinked towards the Fallen Oak, saw a brown shadow leap onto the knotted tendrils of the splintered log. Hawkstar. He skilfully climbed by using pawholds between the roots and used his claws to steady himself when he reached the top. A few cats already milled below.
"We can discuss the rest of the patrols later. For now, let's see what Hawkstar wants," Reedfang ordered the other cats, confidence raised by Icetalon's praise.
"Yes, deputy," Russetdawn mocked an apprentice voice, her tail twitching with amusement. Reedfang felt a spark of annoyance, but still deeply admired how Russetdawn teased any high-ranking cat. Allowing her small remark to pass with a polite purr, he dismissed the group, then trotted to the Fallen Oak. He sat near the front, where he'd seen Foxmuzzle sit, nevertheless self-conscious as the

rest of the Clan gathered behind him, whispering frantically. As a distraction to cur his unease, he marvelled at what a privilege being deputy could be.
Organizing patrols, important decisions, more respect from your Clanmates. But what tantalised Reedfang the most, what made his heart swell, was the chance of leadership. All that power... his paws tingled. All that responsibility... his belly dropped, like a stone sinking to the riverbed. Would he make decisions well? Could he meet the Clan's expectations? What would the other Clans think of him? What if it came to war?
Then what?
Silence from his Clanmates disturbed his ponder. "....to the Gathering will be..." Reedfang glanced up sharply towards Hawkstar, whose gaze rested on the Clan. The meeting had started!
"...Dewfeather; Mothpetal; Willowpaw; Scarface; Pounceprey; Mudsplash; Nightpaw; Blueripple; Weaseldash, and of course, the medicine cats, deputy and I."
"Don't any of us get to go?" a kit mewed behind him. He turned his head (like all of the other cats) and saw Mousefern's son, Wheatkit, staring up at Hawkstar at the edge of the crowd.
The long-furred leader meowed gruffly, with a hint of amusement, "No, Wheatkit. All kits of *any* age are forbidden to go to Gatherings. The journey would be tiresome and it's part of the Warrior Code."
Reedfang could almost see Wheatkit's mind furiously processing this simple statement as he stared at the ground. "Then why do elders get to go?"
Gasps erupted all around Reedfang.
"Wheatkit...! What are you doing?" Mousefern hissed sharply, "Show some respect!" Yet, the elders murmured with sympathy and amusement for the oblivious kit. It wasn't a secret that Wheatkit lacked more intellect than most cats did. Not after he couldn't even fight Pebblekit properly.
Now that *was a statement...*
Hawkstar's ear twitched. "Elders have fulfilled their duties to the Clan and-"
"But what if-"
"Meeting dismissed!" Hawkstar interrupted, looking quite irritated with the many questions. As cats began to stand up, purring with amusement, Hawkstar added, "Since it's sunhigh, drink and feed before the sun gets too low in the sky. I expect the cats chosen to go

the Gathering to be ready by sundown! Unless you want a Gathering where you freeze your paws off, of course."
Every cat instantly advanced to their chosen activities, while Mothpetal, Dewfeather and Weaseldash cast sympathetic glances towards Wheatkit. Reedfang couldn't see why they pitied him so much. His lack of intellect was natural; Wheatkit was one of the rare Affected. Birdsong had described it as a cat born with nightcough and cursed with birth defects. Not that it mattered anymore - it was unspoken but the whole Clan knew that he would probably die by the end of his apprenticeship. His first apprentice, Birchpaw, did. Reedfang's stomach churned with grief.
Reedfang brushed the thought away. Wheatkit wasn't getting any was smarter, was he? Tail twitching, Reedfang brushed past Sootwhisker to choose a small carp from the fresh-kill pile. His younger brother, carrying a trout, gave him a nod. Reedfang nodded back. As Sootwhisker moved away, Reedfang saw the senior warriors walk towards him again. His heart leapt in surprise.
"So, you've decided rest of the patrols for tomorrow? For example, the dusk patrol?" Dewfeather prompted, selecting a trout for herself, green eyes humorous.
"Yush..." Reedfang mumbled through his carp, surprised that the senior warriors had returned so quickly, "Uhm...maywe Villowvaw can vo vith Mothvetal vund-"
"Reedfang. Take the fish out of your mouth - you're a deputy now. Not a kit," Dewfeather scolded him, whilst Russetdawn and Icetalon chuckled between themselves.
"Yes, mothe- I mean, Dewfeather..." he replied, feeling his fur prickle with embarrassment again.

~

Reedfang's fur rippled with excitement as he saw the Gathering Island appear through the reeds. Wind buffeting the rough stems against his pelt, Reedfang paused to scent the sharp, musty leaf-fall air, embedded with tree sap and marsh. His Clanmates streamed around him, sleek in their pelts, fluid in their movements. Not clumsy like broad-shouldered BirchClan or agitated like HillClan. Padding further from the reeds onto marshland, he saw the moon had risen above the horizon, the sky clear with countless stars twinkling like sunlight reflected on water. StarClan was content.

Silent, he bounded across the marshy ground, close behind Hawkstar. He didn't mind when his pads became soggy and slimy as water squelched between his paws; he was a CreekClan cat after all. As he and the patrol gained closer, Reedfang prepared to leap onto the tree-bridge that had given the Clans lifetimes of access to the island. Hawkstar bounded onto the tree, and used his tail to balance his way. Landing, he kinked it over his back; it was safe to cross. Reedfang confidently placed his round paws on the rotten trunk, eyeing the long scars from claws of slower, more scared cats that couldn't swim. That were scared from falling into the calm lapping waters below. The thought made satisfaction creep through his pelt, pad a little faster till the trunk started rocking. CreekClan had such a superior advantage over the other Clans! Why hadn't he seen this before?

"Reedfang, watch it!" Weaseldash's breath grazed hot on the deputies' tail-tip.

Shame flooded him. "Sorry!"

"Look! MarshClan are here too!" Willowpaw yelled somewhere behind him.

Hurrying off a splintering root, Reedfang twisted his head and saw MarshClan's patrol slink from shadowed bushes. Shaking dead leaves off their ragged pelts, they were about the same size as CreekClan's, if not a little bigger. At the head, his amber eyes burning with disdain, was Viperstar. His bulk seemed almost too unrealistic for a Clan cat, but he nevertheless strode on, rudely shoving past CreekClan cats - earning sharp hisses but wary gazes - until he was on the edge of the trunk with his patrol. Eyes narrowing, Reedfang couldn't help but glance at his flabby belly. Perhaps the rumors of Viperstar being a former kittypet were true.

Weaseldash growled low in his throat beside him.

"Vipertail," The fur across Hawkstar's spine bristled. "The cat who complains most about borders, but isn't afraid to cross them whenever he pleases."

Confidence lifted by this, the CreekClan patrol yowled with agreement. MarshClan cats hissed insults back - only the apprentices scuffled their paws. One at either end of the trunk, the leaders stared for a long moment, tails twitching, paws squelching marsh. One blue. One amber. Reedfang could almost feel the tension crackle between the two cats, like lightning on a humid night. To his dismay, the deputy felt relieved he hadn't a rival like

this. Guilt gnawed his stomach. But wasn't that what leadership was about? Being superior over your rivals?
"Hawkfur." Viperstar's rough voice crossed into a purr, and he held up one of his distinct black paws, as if surrendering. "You know we aren't supposed to fight at Gatherings. Let's discuss this matter diplomatically."
"Yes. Why not?"
Viperstar ignored him, scented around. "And where is Foxmuzzle? Our recent patrols report unease within CreekClan."
CreekClan stiffened as one. They willed Hawkstar to answer quickly. "...CreekClan patrols have also found-"
"You didn't answer my question, Hawkstar." Viperstar swished his tail.
"We have many-"
Viperstar coughed. He paused, blinked at Hawkstar expectantly.
Inside his throat, Reedfang felt a growl rise. Hawkstar shot a glance at him over his shoulder. Reedfang stayed quiet.
"Now if you'll excuse me-"
Viperstar cracked a reed.
Hawkstar padded forward. "Viperstar, you need to-"
"-where's he at?" a MarshClan apprentice called.
The brown leader twitched.
"Why not ask him yourself?" Hawkstar's tail smacked fallen leaves skywards. "He's in StarClan if you want him!"
Viperstar's tail stopped swishing.
The apprentices' eyes widened.
Shredded leaves fluttered sadly.
"Ah...oh."
Hawkstar stormed away in reply.
Silence smothered the two Clans.

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It hadn't been long until the other Clans arrived. Then the island became a swath of colourful pelts with all their swishing tails and ecstatic chatter until their mews cascaded into one buzzing, yowling voice. Quite like a river, only Reedfang felt half-deaf as he spoke to Nightpaw, "Okay, um..." He hesitated as his younger brother fixed him with the glare of an adder. Their earlier argument flashed in his mind. He swallowed. "Be careful when you're talking to the

other Clans. Remember to find all you can about them, not the other way around."
The black apprentice regarded him coolly, as if they were equals. "I already knew that," was all he meowed above the noise, before slinking between a wave of apprentices that came rambling through. Reedfang watched him leave, his heart stinging like it had been clawed. Was Nightpaw still angry with him? Then frustration prickled his pelt. The Clan had to come first. It was the Warrior Code! If Nightpaw wanted to sulk about that simple fact, then-
"Reedfang, Nightpaw o'ly wants our family to stay t'ether." Reedfang jerked around to see his father grooming his fur beside him. The frail black tom was a reflection of Sootwhisker, only with white whiskers. He paused and blinked at Reedfang with that calm, amber gaze of his. *Such calm...*
Reedfang shook his head. "Nightpaw just wants to be difficult."
Scarface nudged him heartily, the scars dotting his eyes scrunching in dry humour. "Of course, whatever y'say, deputy. I'm sure both of you will sort yourselves out soon."
Reedfang paused at his father's light tone. He was simply trying to make him feel better. "What?" Reedfang nudged his father back, only to be jostled closer by passing cats. "You don't agree with your eldest son?"
"Why 'ould I? You an' Nightpaw have been arguing since he could mewl." His father's gaze stared past Reedfang's shoulder. "Let me tell you 'om experience - it's not as attractive to them she-cats as you migh' think."
Reedfang followed his gaze, leaning around cats who blocked his way, to find a ginger she-cat surrounded by chatting cats staring in their direction. Tail flicking leaves on a shrub, her pelt was thin and skinny like HillClan cats. She winked at him. His pelt scorched like wildfire.
"Who-?"
But Scarface was already on his paws. "Go and meet 'er; she's an ol' friend o' mine. You might learn som'thing."
"But-?"
"Don't get hopeful. She's taken. And from another Clan." With that, his father nudged him once more and walked away. Reedfang couldn't help but sigh in relief. At least he didn't have to worry about impressing she-cats. *Still...*
After a long moment of listening to his heart pound with

nervousness, Reedfang started to approach the she-cat. His kept his eyes downwards, aware that the she-cat was watching him. His pelt burned furiously. Left paw, right paw, don't step on stray tails, he told himself. Look like a deputy. He forced his head up, only to find his gaze locked with light green eyes. The she-cat. His stomach clenched hard. Then she actually spoke to him, "I know what you're thinking. I'm already expecting kits, thank you." She winked at him again.
Reedfang snapped his gaze away. "I-I wasn't even thinking about...that, but congratulations!"
"I was just messing with you," she purred, "Falconwing would never let me..." Her gaze darkened for moment and her eyes travelled across her barely noticeable leg scars. They weren't puffy with infection, but Reedfang's warrior knowledge told him the area had been scratched repeatedly. Shock and slight suspicion running through him, he wanted to ask whether Falconwing had done that to her, but decided it would be inappropriate and uncomfortable for her at this time. He would save it for quieter moment, perhaps. The she-cat's warm gaze returned quickly, and she flicked her tail, gestured for him to sit down. He accepted, with hesitation and concern. "So, I hear your Scarface's son or something. What's your name?"
As Reedfang opened his maw, Viperstar's yowl rang out from a branch in the Great Trees. "You WHAT? I always knew BirchClan were weak!"
Cats of all Clans gasped in shock.
Viperstar had rounded on Swallowstar with claws unsheathed! The sleek, black BirchClan leader was holding her red chest tightly with one white paw. Viperstar lashed his black, dented tail-tip, but meowed more calmly to the shocked leader, "I think the Clans should know about this..."
Swallowstar looked like she was about to protest, but then nodded, and gazed beyond Viperstar, into the distance. The white tom flicked back his black-rimmed ears, and yowled boldly, "Clan cats of the lakeside, even though the Gathering hasn't started the way it should, tonight we have a *disgraceful* scandal we have to discuss!"
Cats started murmuring worriedly amongst each other, asking things like:
"Disgraceful?"
"Scandal?"

"When has Swallowstar ever been a *disgrace*?"
"Swallowstar has done something so surprising and traitorous, I think StarClan can't forgive her for this!" Viperstar continued, glaring at Swallowstar.
Reedfang glanced around, and noticed that BirchClan seemed to be very uneasy at Viperstar's words. He whispered to the queen beside him, "Why do you think BirchClan look so worried?"
"There may be trouble ahead..." the she-cat sang quietly, her light green eyes reflecting moonlight. "Name's Grassflower by the way."
"Reedfang..." he meowed cautiously, wondering why she was taking this situation so lightly. He then shook his head, and listened to the leader's conversation again.
"...Swallowstar has allowed *kittypets* into BirchClan!" Viperstar hissed.
"No! Is this true, Swallowstar?" gasped Amberstar, the HillClan leader. Her head peeked out close to a trunk, eyes wide, red ginger fur ruffled by rustling leaves.
Hawkstar stood up from the tree opposite. "You didn't...?"
"I did," Swallowstar mewed quietly, picking every word carefully, "Before you accuse me, you see, these *kittypets* have travelled from their homes, looking for our Clans..."
"Looking for our Clans?" Viperstar hissed in disgust. "I bet they wanted to drive us all out again!"
MarshClan, HillClan and a few CreekClan warriors yowled in agreement.
Swallowstar shook her head. "This time it's differe-"
"Swallowstar," Viperstar retracted his claws, though his tail lashed brown leaves off their stems, "don't you remember this new-leaf when those kittypets, not to mention filthy *rogues* and *dogs*, drove us out? They planned that attack for seasons and they killed practically half the Clans - just for a bit of territory! Every cat here is lucky that attack left enough survivors so the Clans could be restored!"
"Viperstar, if you would just liste-"
"There's no *need* to listen, Swallowstar! Those kittypets are here to spy - and I know it!" Viperstar meowed, exasperated, "They must be rid of immediately!"
"Yeah! They pose a threat to all of us!" yowled some cat from MarshClan. A few others protested then the other Clans joined in to form a crescendo of yowls.

Suddenly, Swallowstar managed to muster some courage, and snarled defiantly, "For this moment, these kittypets are BirchClan's business, and BirchClan's business *only*! Whatever the Warrior Code says!I If they are caught spying, attacking or whatever, they will be dealt with in the way they were treated in the past! And you know what that means!"
The other cats grumbled at Swallowstar's point, but they couldn't find fault with it, so they kept quiet. Viperstar, however, continued, "Even though you might deal with those kittypets when they do something wrong, I still don't trust them. Do something about it, or risk the Clans being driven out again."
Amberstar started to nod, just as Hawkstar spoke from his branch, "MarshClan may openly address BirchClan's weakness of always taking in outsiders, but I doubt they will explain to us why there was a MarshClan apprentice on CreekClan territory!"
"Yeah! And explain why there were two loners on our territory as well!" Nightpaw yowled to his right.
"Two *loners*?" Viperstar sneered, "What would MarshClan want with a few loners?"
"You're not answering my question, Viperstar." Hawkstar had a hard edge to his voice now, "Stop making excuses."
"I'm not making excuses! I'm telling you the truth here - honestly!" Viperstar protested, giving Hawkstar a wide-eyed look, but Reedfang saw through his fake innocence. His paws twitched. *The nerve!*
Hawkstar narrowed his dark blue eyes, and twitched his tail in annoyance. "Just because you *say* 'honestly', doesn't actually *make* it honest. Now tell me why you sent one of your apprentices inside our territory."
"In this situation, that is a question I cannot-"
"Hawkstar, Viperstar. This argument will go on all night if you two continue on like that," Amberstar meowed flatly, her green eyes flashing. "Discuss this petty argument in your own territories, will you?"
"Yes," Viperstar agreed instantly, shooting a meaningful glance at Hawkstar. "This matter can be discussed elsewhere."
"Fine," Hawkstar huffed, "And, by the way, since you seem so eager to disrupt us, you can start, Amberstar."
"Gladly!" The lighter-flecked she-cat sighed in exasperation. "We can finally stop embarrassing our Clans."

"Even leaders can act like kits sometimes!" Grassflower giggled into Reedfang's ear.
Reedfang was beginning to like this optimistic queen.
Amberstar started to meow, "As usual in leaf-fall, the prey has begun to fall in our territory. However, HillClan still remains strong, " - she eyed the other leaders - "and we would like to congratulate our new apprentice, Smallpaw, and our new warrior, Lichenfoot. Both have come to the Gathering tonight."
The Clans let out yowls of congratulations, and Reedfang saw a tabby tom with grey paws and a pale tabby she-cat with very small paws amongst the crowd. They shuffled their paws but looked on confidently. As the cheering died down, Amberstar withdrew from her standing position to a sitting pose, and motioned with her tail to the other leaders.
Viperstar flicked his tail towards the crowd, "All MarshClan needs to report is that prey is running fine, and no, no cat of ours has been crossing borders," - he stared directly at Hawkstar who locked gazes calmly - "but yes, we will shred any cat who cross ours."
There were a few murmurs in the crowd.
"That is all. Swallowstar?"
Swallowstar nodded, "Plentiful prey has blessed BirchClan this season, but unfortunately the mate of one of our queens, Foxpetal, has died two days before she gave birth to three lovely kits named Oakkit, Amberkit and Maplekit. His name was Copperstream, and the cause of his death was greencough."
The Clans murmured grief.
"CreekClan is well, but we also have had a death this leaf-fall. Our noble deputy, Foxmuzzle, died horrifically because of nightcough," Hawkstar mewed, gaze down. It was clear to Reedfang that he had hoped to skip the announcement.
Amberstar then admitted, "Our medicine cat apprentice, Galepaw, died last night, also because of nightcough. This would have been her first Gathering."
"And, of course, Stonekit died just over a moon ago. MarshClan still grieves for his loss." Viperstar finished. He had shared eye contact with Clawshadow through all the death announcements.
"But on a brighter note," Hawkstar declared, before the sad atmosphere could weigh them all down, "we have a new warrior, Pounceprey! And our new deputy is Reedfang!"
Now it was Reedfang's turn to shuffle his paws. He perked up his

ears, and desperately fought the will to paw at his nose in anxiousness. Locking gazes with his brothers for support, he flicked his sleek tail, acknowledging the countless stares and yowls that they received from the Clans. His fur felt hot, but underneath, pride and satisfaction swelled in him like a flash flood. He deserved this! As the Clans turned back towards the Great Trees, his fur still burned, but he thought perhaps gaining attention wasn't so bad.
Then Grassflower mewed, surprised, "Heh. You didn't tell me you were deputy! You were embarrassed, weren't you?"
"Well... I sorta..." he trailed off as he saw the four leaders each climb down from their branches, and found the perfect excuse to get up. "Oh, look, my Clan is going now! I'd better leave!"
Grassflower purred. "Me too. See you at the next Gathering! Unless my kits want to see me first."

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Bad Trip - Brian Tyler (Far Cry 3 Original Soundtrack)

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Hey guys, not much in the Author's Note today! (As usual)

Before you comment, the deputies aren't supposed to sit underneath the tree roots at Gatherings in Fallen Leaves. Nor do the Clans do some other things.

Time's changed, yo.

7 An Unexpected Friend

Last Updated: July 11 2017

The wheat-coloured tom-kit bounced around Mother's solemn swaying tail. His heart bounced with joy for the mossillionth time. Three more moons until his first warrior training! By now, he was well adapted to walking, and despite a few stumbles here and there, nothing could stop this fierce CreekClan warrior! His paws ripped apart a moss ball (really, it was a MarshClan warrior in disguise!).
"Mother! Mother!"
"What?" she mewed, distant, eyes fixed on the reeds encircling the nursery. (Wheatkit had noticed she'd been doing that a lot since Dead Father. She didn't speak as much either).
"I, um, wanted to play with Gorge outside, and I, um, wasn't sure if I was allowed to do so, so, uh...yeah, that!" Maybe seeming nervous would coax Mother to lick his fur?
"Whatever you want."
Only her mouth moved.
"Um..." Wheatkit batted the shredded moss ball. "Are you sad about Dead Fat-"
"Just leave!" she screeched. Wheatkit yowled in fright and leapt up and tripped over his moss and hit the floor and his cheek hurt and he tumbled out the nursery and hissed as reeds and sticks scraped his fur and there was a blurry Gorge and-
THWUMP!
-and his vision went blurry and his cheek hurt more and he leapt up and his back hurt and and-
A light brown she-kit stared at him.
She blinked, blue eyes bright against the setting Biting Moss.
"AH! Oh, uh, sorry, Gorge. I, uh, was just, y'know, er..." Wheatkit trailed off as Gorge said nothing. Panicking, Wheatkit's mind darted about, hoping to find something to say. A warrior never just tumbled out of a den!
Think, Wheatkit, think!
"Oh! Moss-brains! Are you all right?" *She won't think I'm a fish-brain, will she?* "...W-well, are you?"

"Yes, Wheatkit. I'm great!" she soft-growled, prodding his cheek with one silver-blue paw. His ears perked.
"Eh?"
"And your mother is so nice to me!"
A sudden horrible horrible emotion prickled his fur. It wrenched his stomach and his insides swelled like a raging surge of water. He pawed at the chilly, wet leaves underneath his paw-pads and licked his chest, trying to hide it. "S-she is? To you? She's not stiff stiff then dopey like a rabbit?"
Gorge blinked, head tilted. Then she shut her eyes and soft-growled, "I'm not sure what'ya mean, but yeah! She sneaks extra fresh-kill for me-"
- Wheatkit winced -
"-Oh!" Her eyes snapped open. "Don't tell our denmates that, promise? Then I'll sneak some extra prey for you, too! Do you prefer trout or carp? How 'bout that thing called 'squirrel'? I tried it once with... my friend once, but I think it's too furry!"
"Um..."
Then-
Then a yowl cut him off-
Then Wheatkit turned left-
Then two blurry shapes-
SMACK!
Then a rock rammed into the two kits and Wheatkit's breath was forced out of him and he tripped onto the ground again and everything went fuzzy and his head exploded and the world went white and there was a ringing in his ears and he heard a hiss that might be Gorge-
"Oops! I hope we haven't squished Tick and Flea, Stormkit!"
Rosekit's voice echoed like they were in Hawkstar's den, but cold leaves crackled underneath Wheatkit and birds squawked overhead. The Dark had returned to his eyesight.
***Tick** and **Flea?** But I'm not an elder!*
"Don't call us Tick and Flea! It's really mean! And I don't even like ticks - they itch too much!" Gorge squealed from underneath Rosekit. Luckily, she was small and could wriggle out. Wheatkit shivered at the cold wind she left behind. Unfortunately, he was much larger, and couldn't even move a paw as Stormkit's unbearable weight crushed his spine. His cheek pulsed. Why didn't any of his Clanmates help him fight off his denmates' attack?

Then the weight shifted-
As if a paw-
Moving Stormkit-
Then-
"Ow, Rosekit!" That was Gorge.
Then-
"Oof!"
Wheatkit's was sure his spine cracked as Rosekit barrelled onto him. He tried to call out for help, but as he opened his mouth, dusty soil spilled into his maw, and made him sneeze. Even more dirt into his maw. He coughed. He hacked. Stormkit sneered in disgust, as Rosekit mocked Gorge's high-pitched kit mewl, "Don't call us Tick and Flea! They itch too much!"
Gorge yowled, "Hey! HEY, Mousefern! Birchflower!"
"Oh, whatever, Tick!" Stormkit spat. "The Clan doesn't care about outsiders!"
Then Rosekit soft-growled with spite, "Yeah. Do you ever notice that no cat pays attention to you? It's because you're just a worthless, stinkin' loner."
Mewing with agreeing, Stormkit pressed Wheatkit's muzzle into soil.
Into its cold, choking darkness-
He couldn't breathe-
Couldn't cry out-
Then claws-
Claws seared his aching spine-
His burning-
Hurting-
Wrenching-
"Why?" a soft whisper mewled, "What has Wheatkit ever done to my littermates?"
An unfamiliar mewl.
"Huh?" Stormkit, Rosekit and surprisingly, *Russetdawn*, all meowed in unison. (He couldn't scent with all this dirt.) Wheatkit felt claws and weight retract from his spine, and he shakily hobbled upright, groomed dirt off his maw. And guess what he saw there?
Featherkit.
Though her image was blurry, it was Featherkit.
In front of her littermates.
Being his friend.

His heart swelled.
"Feather...? Did you-"
"Did my kit just *speak* for the first time since she was born five moons ago?" Russetdawn interrupted, staring. Her tail bounced and she thumped her paws slightly.
"Yep," Stormkit cuffed a grass blade. "Five moons later."
Rosekit just stared.
Stormkit added, "But were going to ask you to 'play' with Wheatkit too..!"
Featherkit's fur rippled.
Russetdawn soft-growled. "I think Featherkit wants you to say sorry to Wheatkit, isn't that right?"
She nodded.
Rosekit and Stormkit twinged.
So Russetdawn reluctantly stomped over to Wheatkit and patted his head roughly. He squeaked. "Hey-"
"I apologize on behalf of my kits. I'll make sure *they* never harm you again."
Then she plunged his muzzle into the soil.

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The Choice - Gustavo Santaolalla (The Last of Us Original Soundtrack)
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8 Just Don't Die

Last Updated: 11 July 2017

The russet-red she-cat followed her youngest daughter's every pawstep until her bushy tail-tip trailed past the nursery's reed stems. They wobbled in her absence.
Russetdawn felt disgusted.
Featherkit never even so much as glanced at her, even when she tried to gently prompt her to talk. Featherkit never ate with her, even when she invited her to the fresh-kill pile. Featherkit never-
She breathed deeply. Love and anger stormed within her as she retracted her paw from Wheatkit's abnormal head. But of course, as soon as *He* was getting technically 'hurt' by Stormkit, she had to interrupt the fun, and silence everyone with her load of blabbering nonsense. Then guilt pierced her fur like frostbite.
Featherkit was her kit-
Her own-
Her lov-
Hissing in rage, she smacked Wheatkit as he attempted to right himself. He cried out in anger and pain. It didn't change her mood. As an alternative action, she motioned to Rosekit and Stormkit to follow her. Well, at least *they* had a chance of a worthwhile future. She completely ignored Wheatkit's stunned, trembling body, and scooted past the stiff-furred Gorge, about to travel across the clearing with her kits. She forced herself to relax by noticing the setting sun, the red-streaked sky...
Didn't her mother always say that represented rain and death?
Russetdawn ripped apart grass in frustration. *Forget them! They burned in BirchClan! They deserved it for what they did, right? It wasn't my-*
"R-Russetdawn!"
Outlined against the willow, body shaking, Weaseldash's usually tranquil orange eyes were frantic, "H-Honeypaw is very sick, but Birdsong is out and Eelpaw doesn't know all of the sickness signs yet! You were there when Foxmuzzle's body was shown by Icetalon, remember? *You* should know what's wrong - it isn't whitecough for

sure!"
Russetdawn nodded firmly, using her tail to calm the panicked father. While she secretly relished that Weaseldash came to her before any other cat, she knew that the Clan must be assured that everything would be all right, otherwise it would turn into chaos. One of the duties of a senior warrior, she guessed. And, if anymore cats died because of-
Her heart twinged.
"Okay, Rosekit, Stormkit. Take Wheatkit and Gorge into the nursery and stay there until we're done." She ordered her precious kits, without turning her head.
"Okay, let's play moss ball, Storm!" Rosekit yowled behind her, crackling leaves under her paws. "Race ya!"
"Hey, wait up!"
"And don't forget to tell Mousefern to come too!" Weaseldash called after them. Then bolting past Russetdawn, he ran to the medicine cat den. It was quite obvious that he was dead sick about the welfare of his only daughter. Mind the pun.
Swiftly padding towards the small reed patch that enclosed the den, Russetdawn slithered down the rabbit-length wide entrance. Darkness, humidity and the reek of herbs swamped the underground den. It was supposed to be small so that no foxes or badgers could fit through if there was an attack. Supposedly. Russetdawn nosed away sticky lichen drooping down in front of her.
Then-
"YOWRORO! Father, it hurts! Make the pain go away! Please!" The cream-coloured she-cat clutched her belly, and writhed violently like a headless snake.
Honeypaw stank of crowfood.
"Sssh!" Weaseldash pressed his light ginger head to his daughters' cheek, "It's all right...Eelpaw will make it better for you...Eelpaw?"
Eelpaw was currently frozen next to bundles of ripped herbs, staring at Honeypaw, water-blue eyes dilated. Russetdawn's mind buzzed at the drowning noise and fear scent. Her heart wrenched at the chaotic situation. If nothing was done soon-
Maintaining calm, she slapped the blue-grey idiot with her long tail. He jumped, startled.
"Hey! Eelpaw!" Russetdawn waved her paw in front of his face, "Honeypaw is almost literally *dying* with pain, and you're standing

there like a lopsided badger!" Her stomach dropped at the thought of Eelpaw not being able to help. "You're supposed to be CreekClan's medicine cat, right?"
"R-right," he mewed slowly, cautiously glancing at Russetdawn like she was a StarClan cat. Her fur bristled with frustration at his incompetence.
"Then do what medicine cats *do*! Heal her for StarClan's sake!" She snapped in his face, whilst Weaseldash twitched his brown-tipped tail in surprise.
"Russetdawn...? I never thought..."
The young tom apprentice cowered back as sharp as a cornered mouse. He was trembling. "B-but, I don't know how. I'm not a full medicine cat yet..."
Russetdawn smacked one paw across her face, and sighed in both desperation and exasperation, "Do you want some *help* then, Eelpaw?"
I swear he could be Wheatkit's kin at times...
Uh...yeah..." Slowly, slowly, "I suppose that would be easier than-"
Honeypaw screeched.
"F-fath- YRROW!"
Russetdawn's ears rang-
"Eelpaw! HELP HER!"
Eelpaw's scent was a whirlwind-
But his paws stayed frozen-
But her paws stayed frozen-
"But what do I do?!"
And Honeypaw just kept on yowling-
Then moss scattered like frightened rabbits-
Then blood hurled from Honeypaw's mouth-
Then blood spattered Weaseldash's maw-
Then Russetdawn's heart wrenched in agony-
Then-
Then-
Then a thought came-
"EELPAW!"
She should do something-
Weaseldash began cleaning Honeypaw with moss-
To save Dawnkit-
But that moss already had pus on it-
But Eelpaw couldn't move-

But she couldn't move-
"FATHER! IT HURTS!"
But what-
"I don't know what to do!"
"It's NIGHTCOUGH! HELP HER, PLEASE!"
But-
But-
But what could she do?
Krssh.
Desperate claws sliced the humid air.
Weaseldash's paw was drenched with Honeypaw's blood.
Her neck wound gaped at the bare ceiling.
For a long moment that lasted seasons, the only sound was the drip-dripping of blood pooling around Honeypaw's twisted form.
Her eyes splayed open.
The crowfood stench was unbearable.
"I...I killed her."
Weaseldash choked.
"I killed my own daughter."
Silence.
Weaseldash closed his daughter's eyes.
"I-I... I had to."
Weaseldash threw up bile.
"She couldn't bear the pain."
The three cats merely stared down at the floor.
Silent grief consumed them all.
Then memories spilled and thrashed in front of the russet-red she-cat.
Her heart wrenched-
How could-
Weaseldash-
Dawnkit-
So similar-
But why-
Then-
"Weaseldash! Honeypaw!"
"What was that yowling? The Clan's in panic!"
Blueripple and Mousefern ripped through the lichen, movements agitated and concerned-
Green scraps fluttered onto Honeypaw-

Their frantic gazes followed it-
Open eyes locked with closed ones-
Silence.
Blueripple collapsed onto her stomach, paws clamped over her face. Then Eelpaw wailed, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, Blueripple! It was me! I didn't save her in time!"
Blueripple mewed nothing.
Eelpaw winced.
Then he raced deeper into the medicine den. "I'll make sure Streamsplash is okay!" Darkness swallowed him.
No cat followed.
Then Blueripple merely buried her head in Weaseldash's fur. It was as if she was ignoring, blocking out the world. Unexpectedly, Mousefern pressed against Blueripple. Ginger, silver and blue-grey fur brushed together. "So much death. So much death."
Russetdawn, awkward, scuffed the bloodied moss with her paws. She felt cut off, unsure how to feel or act. Her heart wrenched with grief at the death of another Clanmate, yet guilt seared her fur. Neither she nor Eelpaw had done anything to help. What kind of Clanmate was she? To distract herself, she padded towards Blueripple-
Then-
"Get away from me!" A blue-grey paw slashed and Russetdawn flinched back. Weaseldash and Mousefern hovered uncertainly. "All of you! Get away!"
No cat moved.
"Get away from my daughter!"
Russetdawn backed away.
She was like this when-
Dawnkit-
"You're the ones who killed her!"
Weaseldash winced. "I'm sorry-"
"Murderer!" Blueripple's tail whipped Russetdawn's fur into place. Her stare hardened and widened until slits bored into Weaseldash. "Why did you end her life?"
He looked away.
Scattered lichen spiked the air.
"So she would feel less pain? You've just caused her more, you fox-hearted crowfood!"
Lichen floated around them, tender and raw.

"How would you feel if you couldn't love your mother and father one last time!?"
Mousefern licked Blueripple's ear in comfort.
She cuffed her muzzle.
Mousefern took the blow.
She understood.
"Let's tell Streamsplash the news," she mewed, voice cracking.
Blueripple's fury faded and she collapsed onto Honeypaw, a seething grief radiating from her.
No cat dared remind her of nightcough.
Russetdawn only now noticed the pounding in her ear fur fading, just a little.
She gazed at Blueripple's huddled form before agreeing, "I'm sure Streamsplash will-"
A cry from Eelpaw. "Streamsplash, wait, Streamsplash! Urrgh, um, hold on! I'll get help."
The four warriors were beside him before he finished.
Moss and herbs flung about, the light grey's tabby stripes were jagged by yellow-green pus and her limbs thrashed about and there was yowling and Blueripple screeched and Streamsplash's eyes blazed and foul-smelling blood spattered her maw and and no oh no-
It was almost an mirror image-
His death-
Foxmuzzle-
Nightcough.
"Please stop crowding Streamsplash, um, Blueripple," Eelpaw darted about beneath Blueripple's bristling form, "I, er, need to, you know, help...!"
Flexing claws glinted a red tinge in the fading sunlight, darkness smoldering every cat with a dreary shadow. Russetdawn heart skipped. She wouldn't...?
"I think you've helped enough, you useless crowfood!" Eelpaw's ears flattened at the blue-grey mother's icy tone. He shrank like a pathetic mouse, merely a kit under Blueripple's glare.
Streamsplash groaned, thrashes ceasing.
"M-mother? What's-"
Blueripple ignored him, halting Weaseldash with her stare as he was backing away, wrinkling his nose at the slimy, rotting stench.
She snarled with outrage, "Traitor! First you murder, now you

recoil! What kind of mate are you?"
She pointed her tail at Mousefern. "You! All you did for Foxmuzzle was sob. Not even bury his corpse." She ripped a few stray reeds and tenderly placed it near Streamsplash, who merely fixed Blueripple with a bemused stare. The old CreekClan death ritual.
"I'll make sure my sister and daughter get more respect."
Mousefern's eyes flashed. "We both have lost a cat we love. We understand and share each others' grief. Don't ruin it now."
"And haven't you noticed Streamsplash's not dead yet?" Russetdawn piped up.
Blueripple snarled, "Nightcough is bound to take her. It took my Honeypaw."
Her tail lashed.
Then Streamsplash mewed, "Blueripple, come here."
The mother rushed to her sisters' side.
"Look," Streamsplash coughed, delicate gaze wandering between each cat. Silence held them, "I see Honeypaw has passed, but is that any reason to fight?" A choke racked her body for a heartbeat. "It won't resurrect her from StarClan. But I am sure she will forgive us all by giving her kin the goodbye she never had. I can tell her all the wonderful things you said when-"
"Shut up," Blueripple snarled.
Streamsplash looked up sharply, only her chest heaved and a hoarse croak came out, "Sister?"
Their gazes locked.
"That would make Honeypaw jealous, mouse-brain."
Weaseldash padded towards her, "But wouldn't-"
She slapped his muzzle shut. "You and Weaseldash are both-"
"-Mother, please stop!" Eelpaw wailed.
"Shut up!" She glared full at Streamsplash but spoke as if cursing an absent cat. "You are both ungrateful pieces of living fox-dung!"
When Russetdawn placed a pawpad on Streamsplash's neck, there was no pulse.
Her heart wrenched again, though it already ached.
Streamsplash was empty and bare of life.
Shocked eyes splayed open like Honeypaw.
Accusing Blueripple.
"My sister died without any comfort."
"My sister died without any comfort."
The blue-grey mother screeched.

She raced outside.
No cat followed.
They didn't dare.
"Streamsplash was such a good cat..." Russetdawn murmured, then straightened, "Let's clean up before nightcough spreads. Eelpaw, gather some herbs to cleanse the stench-"
"Woah, woah, woah!" Weaseldash interrupted as Eelpaw ran off to do what she asked, "So are just going to order us around, a heartbeat after two cats of our family died?"
Russetdawn's tail quivered as Mousefern, the stupid queen, took this moment to insult Russetdawn. Probably for her pathetic kit. "Yes. Have you no heart, Russetdawn?"
"Father, don't..." Eelpaw's mew was muffled by herbs. The sickly clash of lavender, mint and crowfood turned Russetdawn's stomach.
"Well, what?" Mousefern hissed, "Are you just a sadistic, cold she-cat who teaches her kits to bully?"
The russet red she-cat dug her claws into moss. Sticky pus squelched beneath her cold pawpads. Fur rising, she growled to both warriors:
"I am just trying to do what is best for the Clan, yet you freely accuse me of being disloyal? All I wanted you to do was to talk to Reedfang, and ask him for spare warriors to help clean the medicine cat den, and bury our Clanmates' bodies like we used to. But since you only accuse, not help others, I don't why I should even bother assisting you. Even if it is a duty. So maybe you should think about what you're going to say before you open your stupid mouths."
Weaseldash blinked once, returning Russetdawn's stare. She then added, "And remember, I was your mentor once, plus, I'm senior warrior here. You need to learn to respect your elders more."
"Yes, Russetdawn." Weaseldash outwardly seethed with angry disdain, and he stormed outside. His tail closed Streamsplash's eyes as shoved past.
Russetdawn followed, flicking with her tail to Mousefern to follow. She could hear Weaseldash already explaining the situation. Outside, she raised her head at the sight of her Clanmates eyes flashing curiously or worriedly in the darkness, muttering, spreading rumours. Inside, Russetdawn's heart sagged with the loss. She didn't think she could take much more.

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It starts with pain,
Followed by hate,
Fuelled by the endless questions,
No one can answer.

A stain,
Covers your heart,
And tears you apart,
Just like,
A sleeping kitten.

Now I don't believe men are born to be good,
I don't believe,
The world can be saved.
How did you get here?
And when did it start?
An innocent child,
With a thorn in his heart.

Are you sane?
Where's the shame?
The moment that time passes by,
You cannot rewind,
Who's to blame,
When it's dark.
I*s there a cure for your sickness?*
Have you no heart?

World So Cold - 12 Stones

9 A Small Talk

Last Updated: July 27 2017

A one white paw hooked a moss ball into the nursery with quiet anger. Featherkit felt as tense as the thick, humid air around her. Away from the Clan's eyes, her family acted like rogues. Why?
"Featherkit? How come you're inside so early?" Birchflower mewed, her tortoiseshell pelt golden in the fading light, "You would usually be playfighting with your sibling, begging to stay outside just a little longer." She chuckled, nudged Mousefern who was next to her. "We would do that, wouldn't we, old friend?" The silver queen stared at her. "Well, I'm sure you'll be fine by new-leaf, Mousefern!" Birchflower's voice feigned a purr, before she focused on Featherkit. "It seems that outside there was a little scuffle with Stormkit and Rosekit. Were you all preparing for your apprenticeship?"
Featherkit didn't answer and shrugged. She should tell her what really happened, but Featherkits' mind still buzzed with confusion. Her paws kneaded soft moss for comfort and she plopped down into her nest, away from the gentle play-mews of her den-mates. She wanted to be alone. Yet, her tabby fur stood on end slightly as she recalled Birchflower's word were horribly accurate to the truth.
The truth of her siblings bullying.
She shuddered at the fresh memory. *It was wrong, but at least it wasn't me being crushed. Her gaze darted guiltily at Mousefern.*
No, Wheatkit's mother was motionless, distant.
Like she always was now.
A few awkward moments passed, then she heard the thudding vibrations of tiny pawsteps to her left, as all of the remaining kits rushed inside the den. Wheatkit immediately bolted to his mother's side, eyes wide, whilst Stormkit and Rosekit shouldered each other to pounce on Birchflower's kits. Skykit pounced on them first. Gorge followed slowly in after them, her fluffy tail tucked underneath her stout legs, but surprisingly, her mother did not appear.
"Wheatkit! How come you're injured?" At once, Mousefern burst into action, hurriedly licking the long, bleeding scratch on his shoulder. The repulsive scent of blood filled the area, and

Featherkit's belly clenched. She met Wheatkit's eyes. They were frightened balls of blue. She looked away. Mousefern noticed the exchange. Her green eyes blazed, "You three did that to him, didn't you?"
"Um, well, that's where the surprise comes in because, uh-" Wheatkit began, but he was interrupted by Gorge, who suddenly had her tail up straight:
"-because it was *Featherkit* who told Stormkit and Rosekit to stop hurting Wheatkit." Gorge gave Featherkit an awe-inspired look. "She was really brave to defend another kit - and what she said were her first words too!"
Featherkit's mind raced with two very different mixed feelings. One side felt proud and glad of what she had done, whilst the other gnawed at her stomach, furious, as if she was starving for something else. Featherkit didn't know which one to feel, so she flicked one ear to be neutral. Perhaps that was her and her mother shared. Being more...mature about stuff. Even in thoughts.
The flecked queen, with the green gaze as soft as flower petals, purred to Featherkit, "Thank you." Her voice stiffened for a second, her eyes on her littermates, "But I highly doubt that their own *mother* would do anything about it."
Rosekit puffed out a breath, "Mother wants you in the medicine den!"
Stormkit ducked away from Pebblekit's swiping paw, "Yeah, it's important."
A patched tail flicked moss around worriedly. "Is it Honeypaw? Streamsplash?" Birchflower nuzzled her kits. "Mousefern, what's wrong?"
Mousefern was staring at the ground.
She padded through the stick entrance.
No cat followed.

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Yowls penetrated the air.
Rosekit twinged.
Heart racing.
The yowls of her Clanmate.
Ears thumping.
Bristling fur rough against her spine.

Her siblings either side.
The other kits huddled close by.
The air stank of crowfood.
Birchflower poked her head out the nursery, muffling the panicked gasps and mews outside. "Reedfang! Reedfang! What's going on?"
"I'm not sure but...the medicine den...yes, something is wrong!"
Rosekit couldn't see the deputy's face but she saw his twitching paws underneath Birchflower. Signalling Stormkit to follow her, she crept closer.
"Nightcough?"
Rosekit tensed.
Reedfang's (always) worried face, which was now visible, sank like a stone in water, "Maybe. Blueripple and Mousefern just dashed into the medicine den and now it's too crowded-" the raspy voice cut off like a twig snapping.
"Reedfang, come here!" Father. Rosekit's nose twitched in relief. She strained to see past Birchflower's tawny butt.
"Your dawdling uneases the Clan. Come and help like a real deputy!"
Rosekit padded closer.
"Yes, Hawkstar," the deputy called, before adding to the tawny queen. Rosekit's littermates, now beside her out of curiosity, pricked their ears. "Honeypaw and Streamsplash must be really sick-"
"Reedfang!"
"All right!"
Birchflower watched Reedfang leave, then, shaking herself, turned right into Rosekit's nose.
Everycat jumped. "Mrrow!"
A pause.
Then a shriek sliced the silence.
It cut off unnaturally.
"Um, do you want to play moss ball?" she whispered to Featherkit.
Even though Rosekit wouldn't forgive Featherkit for defending worthless Flea and Tick, she was still a CreekClan cat. Unlike Flea and Tick.
She rolled moss into a clump, staring at it, trying to hide her fear.
Her ear fur trembled as she picked up her Clanmates' words outside,
"Was that Honeypaw?"
"I think so! Where's Birdsong?"
"I don't know. There was a shriek - is my apprentice dying?!"

"And we are doing nothing to help! Reedfang, I demand you let me through..."
Rosekit shuddered.
"Mossball, then?" she pressed, voice a little louder.
Then terror raced her spine as a different wail thundered the camp. The same one as Mothpetal when the deputy...
"Blueripple!" Birchflower dashed to the entrance, then skidded to a stop, as if remembering the kits she was caring for. "Kits, come, come. Please, now!"
Pebblekit padded first, awkward and cautious, then everykit scrambled to Birchflower, little pads scattering moss everywhere. They burst into mews, and Rosekit's head rang.
"Why's there yowling?"
"Can we go outside?"
"I want food!"
"Hush," Birchflower's warm, old gaze was dim. Weak rays of sunlight cast down onto her fur. Rosekit couldn't help but feel a little more relieved. Somecat was in control. "Hush, little ones. An old queen like me can't keep up with seven kits."
Skykit reared on his hindquarters, "Lemme see what's going on!"
"Yeah!" Gorge tried to peek around Birchflower's legs. The queen herded everykit backwards.
"No," she mewed, stern as Hawkstar, "This is a situation for-"
"-warriors!" Wheatkit bounced past Birchflower faster than she could react. His pale-gold fur shimmered as he raced through the entrance, stomping reeds and scattering twigs, "I'm a warrior-"
Blueripple's shriek halted him.
He froze, staring at something beyond him.
Rosekit peered outside with her siblings.
Then, with a mighty squeak, he dodged as Blueripple barely missed ramming into him, blue fur wild as she hurtled out the camp. Splashes of water quickly faded. Some cat followed her.
"Stay here, kits," Birchflower meowed, hurrying outside at a trot. Her tail twitched. Rosekit slipped into a hunting crouch and stalked Birchflower as she would her mother's tail. Her denmates, instead of following, hovered at the entrance. Rosekit didn't mind; no kit knew what was going on. She was going to find out.
In camp, her Clanmates bustled near the medicine den like fire ants, circled Reedfang. Breath billowed in the darkness as Weaseldash ran outside, dazed and babbling something. Rosekit stared

curiously, but by now, Birchflower had caught up to the dazed Wheatkit and ushered him towards the den. Ears perked, she dove for a grass clump. Itchy stalks poked her nose. She would be in trouble if she seen!
Then, "Why is Rosekit allowed outside?"
She sighed and peered over a grass stem.
Again, Flea had ruined-
"Yes, Rosekit! Why are you outside?" Skykit stuck out his tongue from the nursery.
She stood up.
Made a show of burying dirt.
Then pointed at the white tom-kit.
Before jaws picked her up by the scruff.
Mousefern's scent. She wriggled. "Put me-"
"-down? Rosekit, why are you...fox dung! I told you to stay inside!"
Rosekit's paws twitched at her mother's language. She stopped wriggling. Met her furious yellow slits. Tried to ignore Birchflower's and Flea's curious stares.
Rosekit sagged. She had let Mother down. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry I didn't listen, Mother. But, in fact, I came to-"
"Don't lie to me. We all need to talk in the nursery."
Her mother stalked away.
Rosekit's heart sank.
I'm sorry, Mother. I'm sorry I couldn't live up to your expectations.

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"Russetdawn!" Whiskers back, Featherkit jumped as Mousefern rounded on her mother. The humid air of the nursery itched her fur as she gazed on with her denmates pressed around her, a distracted Birchflower sorting moss nearby. The old queen seemed uncomfortable with the argument that was occurring, but she stayed silent. Was she worried? Or leaving Mother and Mousefern to sort out themselves?
"Russetdawn, don't argue with me," Mouseferns' lip curled into an ugly snarl, "You should have been a responsible mother, but no, now your *kits* are torturing my son too."
She spared a glance at Featherkit.
"Except one."
Her paws prickled as everycat turned to look at her. She self-

consciously licked her chest.
At that moment, Gorge slipped from the group to Mousefern's side, backing Russetdawn closer to a corner. Rosekit did the same, but closer to Mother. Gazes met. Gorge's cheek twitched as if remembering the nick Rosekit had viciously given her. Rosekit winked at Gorge, as if proud. Featherkit wanted to cuff her sister's face. She was happy at hurting a Clanmate! But uncertainty held her back. Perhaps everything would turn out all right...
"Mousefern is right." Gorge stared level-eyed at Rosekit. "Look at my cheek; you didn't have to claw me, you know. You did it when no cat was looking. You're so unfair!"
Stormkit stood and shouldered his way to his sister's side, earning uneasy glances from Skykit and Pebblekit. *Should we backup our denmates too?* She guessed the others were wondering the same thing.
"You know what's unfair?" Stormkit hissed, lashing moss with his rounded tail. "Having to share a nest with a smelly loner like you. That wasn't when no cat was looking, was it?"
The queens froze.
Wheatkit suddenly hobbled upright, scrambling to his friend's side. "But she's a warrior, like me!"
Rosekit towered above them, shadowing the two kits' faces. Featherkit's fur trembled at a chilly draught. "You're no warrior." She thrust her muzzle close to Gorge, "The Clan must come first. Get out of our camp while it's dark, so no cat has to see your pathetic face."
"I hope you get eaten by a fox," Stormkit added.
Featherkit felt her stomach burn.
"Stormkit! Rosekit!" Birchflower broke the queens' silence. "Is that any way to treat your Clanmates?"
"She's not part of CreekClan," scowled Stormkit.
Rosekit glared at the tortoiseshell queen with defiance, "She's just a loner."
Fur rippling with a fury odd for him, Pebblekit raced forward and batted Stormkit with an sheathed paw, only to be pulled off by Skykit. The four kits tussled.
Shocked, Featherkit backed away from the argument. She bumped into warm fur, tried to scrambled away in the small space, only her paws slid on moss. Gorge, Wheatkit and her, shielded by Birchflower, watched with confusion as Skykit and her siblings

pinned Pebblekit, hissing and snapping. Wasn't attacking a Clanmate wrong? They were quickly separated by Mousefern and Russetdawn. Reeds shivered violently.
"Let. Go!" yowled Skykit, nape stuck in Russetdawn's maw, "I need to go-"
Russetdawn let him plop onto the ground. "No cat is going anywhere. It's too late." She swished her tail, and Mousefern let go of Stormkit. The kits, exchanging hostile glances, rose to their paws.
Mousefern licked a paw, "Birchflower, what do you think we should do?"
Birchflower shook her fur, "Since this "talk" has turned into such, such a terrible argument, I think we need something to smooth those ruffled pelts of yours."
Everycat self-consciously smoothed their fur.
"Um, like being a bit...a bit quiet?" A shaky, squeaky voice. A silver narrow head splashed into blue as it popped through the nursery entrance. Eelpaw yawned with fatigue. Eyes turned to him. He stopped. "Um, Blueripple's back from her...outing. S-she can hear you from the medicine den and told me to tell you, um...um, she can't grieve with this noise."
Mother twitched her ear as she realised the whole camp probably heard their argument. "Would you like us to sleep?"
Eelpaw nodded, then, with an uncertain stare at the scattered moss and tense bodies, backed away slowly and disappeared past the den. Moonlight streamed in. The camp was empty, save for the last few curious stares of her Clanmates, their eyes white reflections of the moonlight.
Featherkit looked at the dormant camp for a few moments, half aware of her denmates slithering around her, heading to sleep. A tense atmosphere lingered in the air. She stared at the swaying reeds at the entrance, picked up the soft trickle of water. She would be an apprentice soon. What would she learn? She lay down, thinking, just as she noticed Mousefern and her mother slipping outside. They didn't even glance back. Heads bent, their red and silver pelts rippled in moonlight. Featherkit, curious, strained to hear their whispers.
"Two more deaths, Russetdawn. Is this an outbreak?"
"No. I won't believe that mouse-brained nonsense. That time is gone."
"I know you miss Dawnkit-"

"Don't say that name. He's in StarClan now so I have nothing to do with him."
Silence.
"But these deaths were only a moon after Foxmuzzle. Doesn't that say something to you?"
"...Yes. But Honeypaw and Streamsplash...died in the medicine den. And Blueripple will want to bury them by tomorrow..."
As Featherkit stifled a small gasp of shock, Wheatkit's gray-rimmed ears perked. He crept slowly from a nest of moss. He slid to the entrance, "Mother, can we look in the medicine-"
"No!" hissed Mousefern and Russetdawn as one. Ears perked. Cats jumped. Her friend took a step back, glanced nervously around. He didn't ask again.

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You,
Can't,
Fix your broken promise,
Our ties have come undone.

I will not be used,
To be battered and abused,
The reason why I choose,
To *cut my losses.*

We're falling,
And we're losing control,
You're pulling us,
You're dragging us,
Down this dead end road.

We follow,
Like Alice,
And just keep diving down the hole...

White Rabbit - Egypt Central
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10 Troubling Disorders

Last Updated: 2 February 2020

Shaky, silver breath billowed into fragile mist before scuttling back into the night. Tentative pawsteps slowed, cracking frost-bitten leaves, inhaled the sharp air. Only CreekClan scents. The heavy, unwavering smell of slumbering cats. The furtive impatience of night creatures. When the camp was sleeping, night time always seemed more oppressive and ripe for chaos. Eelpaw always felt like it was.
He headed to where the nervous trickle of water was strongest. The medicine den. He skittered towards the hole, bleak-yellow reeds framing its compelling blackness. A grieving moan rose from its confines. He shuddered. *Mother... I'm sorry I couldn't save them.*
Grief, as hollow as a bird bone, crushed his throat. The events that had killed his kin plagued his mind. What if he could have found the right herbs? What if Birdsong had been there? She would know what to do. StarClan would. Pausing, the blue apprentice squinted up to the stars in hope of a sign. A curved claw of a half-moon glared down coldly. Its harsh silver light burned his fur, urged him to call out to Blueripple and comfort her. To apologize.
Black swamped his eyes when he scrambled into the medicine den.
"Mother! Blueripple! I-I want to say-"
"Quiet!" Whiskers thrust back, a looming blue-grey shape of Mother shot up, hissing. "My kin can't sleep with that noise!"
"But they're...but they're buried..." Moss squished beneath his paws. "N-no, never mind. I...I told the queens to-"
"To quiet down? Good." Was that a hint of a purr in his mother's voice? "Will you get me a spot of prey? I haven't eaten since sunhigh..."
Eelpaw's ear-tips warmed. Blueripple was becoming herself again!
"Y-yes. Of course!" He scrambled outside, heart thumping as chilly air bit through his fur. He bounded across paw-high marsh, thoughts buzzing. Was his mother finally over her grief? Why hadn't StarClan sent him a sign about his family's deaths? What about the Clan? His jaws clamped on a particular juicy-looking water vole. A

hiss made him spin in fright.
"Eelpaw, just what are you doing?" Birdsong, paws muddy from burying, hurried over from the entrance. His mentor! The blue apprentice dropped the vole and fumbled for words:
"B-Birdsong, I think Blueripple is-"
"Never mind, Blueripple!" she spat, tail lashing, "You were about to eat prey that has nightcough in it!" Her hiss softened, "Don't you think the Clan would be worried about you?"
Shame flooded through Eelpaw. His drooped tail and head sagged as if a badger had crushed him. "It was my fault," his voice shook, "My mother was so happy a moment ago, a-and she wanted prey. I didn't want her to...I didn't want..." He pressed his tongue against his chest fur, licking with tentative strokes. He waited for the inevitable lecture. He had disappointed her.
A tail brushed his flank. "It's okay. I was only worried about you."
Eelpaw didn't look at his mentor. He was too ashamed. "No, no, it's my fault! I would have killed my mother because I'm so mouse-brained." He stared feebly at Birdsong's muddy paws. Muddy because she had had to bury his family. Anger at his incompetence choked his stomach. Why didn't he bury them? They deserved better. Grief stabbed his limbs until they shook. "That's why Streamsplash and Honeypaw died!"
Shaking, he slumped down onto his rear, tearing out clumps of grass. He sensed the unseen eyes of his Clanmates, still awake from the arguments in the nursery, watching him silently. Whispers billowed into the night. What would they think of him now? A useless medicine cat who killed his Clanmates? Then Birdsong's tongue lapped his ear. *Mother used to do this*. He and his mentor sat there for a while, long after his Clanmates had returned to sleep, Birdsong's constant strokes soothing his agitated nerves until his frozen muscles eventually relaxed. Wet peat nipped his rear with cold.
"I couldn't heal a cat once," she whispered, "His name was Dawnkit."
Eelpaw perked his ears. "That is, I mean, was-"
"-Russetdawn's kit." The spotted tabby nudged Eelpaw to unsteady paws. Her singsong tone rasped into a low whisper, "Come with me. A change of scenery will do your heart some good."
Nodding with relief, Eelpaw slipped through the crowd of rustling reeds into the muffled silence of crackling leaves, trickling water and cricket chirps. They padded for a while. It was dark. The

comforting sort. Like the cosy warmth of his mother's heat. *Mother. Blueripple.* Grief once more gripped his tattered emotions with an icy claw. Why couldn't he stop his emotions? If they overwhelmed him, that would call Change. Change...
"As I said," Birdsong mewed suddenly, muscles rippling as she walked, "Dawnkit was the one kit I couldn't save. At a moon old, he was quite the adventurous kit. Like you when you still were a warrior apprentice...before your accident, Eelpaw."
He nodded, interested.
"I heard from Stormkit that one evening he dared them to sneak out of camp. "Only for a bit of fun, " Dawnkit had said. After that, he became boisterous and dared them to swim across a shallow river. But he only thought it was shallow. As you might except, Dawnkit went first but swam too far." His mentor's misty breath quivered in the still air, "He hit the main current. He started drowning... Stormkit and Featherkit were left while Rosekit sprinted to camp like she was being chased by a horde of rats, I was told."
Eelpaw's tail brushed a stray leaf from his pelt. It fluttered down and he paused to follow its path before it wafted onto the soil. Rotten leaves engulfed it. He trotted to catch up to Birdsong, "If Rosekit came to camp, um, you could obviously have saved him."
"Eelpaw, it was also the time of what some cats call the 'Spillage' or 'bloody season'. Cats from every Clan raided each other in secret groups over a silly disagreement whether outsiders, kittypets especially, should be allowed in the Clans. This was after the Clans were loosely scattered, as Viperstar said at the last Gathering, when non-Clan cats attacked us in great numbers. Very recently, in fact; only this leaf-fall have we secured our territories again. They'd grown tired of the Clans stealing hunting space, which is understandable. No matter. Much blood was spilled and cats who protested, outsider or not, were silenced, by their own Clanmates at times. I think it is disgusting, but when it's a question of survival..."
"Er, how did soft *kittypets* drive off battle-fit warriors?"
"It was mostly rogues, and I think the kittypets agreed to help so they could have more space to lie in the sun all day. As they live in Twolegplace, kittypets have more connections to rogues than Clan cats. That might be why they were accompanied by dogs; there are rumours that a rogue named Sharpbone could speak dog, there's another that say he baited them to camps with cats' blood, but it sounds a bit too similar to that old-Clan nursery tale of Tigerstar.

But their *true* leader...? Some say a kittypet, a she-cat, a tom, a beaver, there's one that even suggests it was a group effort. Really, how could outsiders work well together? Make decisions? There were so many wounds to treat..."
Eelpaw shivered as he waded through a shallow stream. "Um..."
"Oh, yes!" Birdsong jolted as they crossed, "Remember when MarshClan and HillClan cats were attacking our non-Clan members? I was so busy healing wounds that, they..." She stopped, stared at the crescent moon's rippled reflection, "He died. He was dead by the time I came. That means it was an accident, wasn't it?" Eelpaw nudged the she-cats' drooping ear. He recognised, in this exposed side of his mentor's happiness, his own vulnerability in her words, the bitter taste of truth that, even as a medicine cat, not even Birdsong could save every cat. Glazed eyes met his. He shook.
They continued walking. "W-what happened after?"
His mentor's delicate fur trembled as it snagged a bush with purple flowers. "Before he was buried, in death he was twitching, still trying to swim." She raised her head, forest-coloured eyes boring into Eelpaw's. ""He's a CreekClan cat so he shouldn't die from drowning. How could StarClan be so cruel to take a kit?" Those were the words of Russetfire. Her heart grieved enough that she demanded her name be Russetdawn. Remember the ceremony? I wonder what it feels like, that she changed her own warrior name, one that she fought and trained for, all for the kit she loved?"
Trembling, Eelpaw licked his mentor's shoulder and pressed his nose to Birdsong's cheek. Weariness washed over him. Hollow and hurting, it was a pit in his gut with charred embers smouldering in him, burning him. Russetdawn had lost so much. So had he. So had the Clan.
"But that wasn't the entire end of the story," Birdsong's wiry muscles flexed as they scrambled over a slimy log. Twigs scraped glistening droplets off her belly fur, "No, Hawkstar did not want CreekClan's reputation to falter. He didn't even mention Dawnkit's death to the Clan."
Eelpaw shuddered.
"He had another reason for it. He said the Clan was grieving too much at the time, and the death of a kit would only hurt them more. But I think the Clan lost his respect after the incident. As such, the news of Dawnkit spread further than he expected. The Gathering." Birdsong paused to nudge his flank, a slight purr in her

voice. "The one when you insisted to stay because I was tiring myself out in camp. All to help sick cats." Her tone became more serious, "At the Gathering, cats argued in circles over kittypets, a dead kit and nightcough. The late green-leaf heat didn't help. As true as it was, Hawkstar unforgettably remained stubborn and denied that CreekClan were weak because of the attack and the fact we neglected a kit. You can call him a lying traitor, but I think...think he cared about this Clan too much to see them being hurt again.
"It's why Russetdawn's litter are so defensive because they don't want to lose each other again. It stunned Featherkit into her premature silence, though I heard she spoke earlier today. It's why Russetdawn acts like a deputy, because she couldn't defend Dawnkit from drowning. It's why she and Hawkstar don't share the same nest anymore..."
"Isn't saving a kit part of the warrior code?"
"You're the only cat I've told this but, I blamed myself for everything. I was...frustrated Dawnkit didn't survive long enough so I could heal him. It clawed at me for moons. As for the warrior code, well, look what happened with Foxmuzzle and your relatives. No death ceremony anymore. Merely a burial. Not even elders join in; they must feel so depressed with all the deaths lately. Who would have heard of a medicine cat burying Clanmates moons ago? But recently the Clans have been slack. Perhaps we can suggest this at the next half-moon meeting?"
Eelpaw slowed to a halt, colder, browner marsh than before smearing his wet paws and belly. Sparse pine trees poked the black clouds like lonely mountains. The dazzling lights of the green-leaf Twolegplace shone in the distance, carrying the acrid tang of Thunderpath. The moon glared down from a higher position in Silverpelt, its hostility voiced by a faint rumble of thunder. They were near MarshClan hunting grounds. Wiping his grubby paws on springy ground, he nodded.
"Now," Birdsong's eyes glistened with their usual happy gentleness, "Sadness aside, how about a quick medicine cat lesson?"
"Here? But we're not at camp!"
"A medicine cat can adapt anywhere if they try, Eelpaw. And most accidents happen outside of camp, away from your herb store. For example...you're hunting with a sunhigh patrol as a break from your medicine duties. Across the border, you witness a lone HillClan

apprentice break his forepaw-"
Eelpaw squeaked with uncertainty.
Birdsong twitched her whiskers, "Something easier then? Let's see... right now, I am the only warrior accompanying you and I complain my belly hurts with no obvious injury. What would you say or do?"
Eelpaw didn't hesitate. "Find juniper berries."
Birdsong's expression was shadowed as the moon was blocked by black clouds. "Juniper berries? With all this wet soil?"
He winced as realisation and embarrassment burned his fur. *Of course!* Juniper bushes would drown in such a marshy environment. But what other herbs cured bellyache? He shuffled his paws, stepping a few mouse lengths before mewing, "Chervil. Chervil is more water resistant, right?"
"True, but does it grow here?"
Eelpaw stared at his round paws. "...No. I-I give up. I'm sorry. I'm your mouse-brained apprentice that doesn't know how to cure a bellyache."
His mentor prodded his shoulder, "Eelpaw, if you gave up now, my bellyache could turn into something worse. Would you want to treat an infection? It also might be simpler as to suggest going to make dirt."
Eelpaw shrank lower. His mind raced with herbs that grew in the marshes. Which one for bellyache?
Birdsong sighed. "Perhaps you just need a little more time. I'm really sorry, Eelpaw." Her whiskers tickled his nose as she nudged his muzzle. "You're still at the beginning of your training, after all. How long, a season or less?"
"About that time." He scented the air and detected the rich smell he'd been thinking of. "I want to show you something."
Birdsong curled her tail. "Of course."
Eelpaw swiftly padded to the stream they had passed earlier. Jaw parted, he tilted his head around to find the strongest trail. Above the sharp scent of distant rain, the sweet smell filled his head until it overpowered the sharp tang of water. The gurgling stream flashed as moonlight grew stronger, until it flushed the whole bank with silver. He stopped at a beech and flicked his tail towards a hunched bush that clung to the bank with spiky purple flowers. "The plant you snagged your fur on...is it watermint?"
His mentor purred, parting her jaws to confirm the scent. "Yes! Well done, Eelpaw, you-" Birdsong became ice. Confused, Eelpaw scented

the air. It was a disgusting scent of crowfood coming from downwind - MarshClan cats a distance away. A night patrol? Then alarm made him bristle his fur when the scent rapidly multiplied. It came from the direction of camp. As Birdsong's spotted tail hooked, Eelpaw's stomach leapt as he recognized the tail signal.
Intruders!

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The pair thundered over marsh, streams and undergrowth, swift paws flicking mud and dust that showered their eyes in their haste. Eelpaw coughed, falling behind Birdsong a few strides. "Please keep going!" his mentor panted, brown fur a blur as she crashed through the beginning of the reed forest. "I think MarshClan are going to attack camp, so we have to get there before them! Now!"
Yes, we must defend this Clan, Eelpaw! A husky, rumbly yowl echoed in his head, buzzing his thoughts.
Change!
Eelpaw had barely acknowledged its voice before exploding through the reed forest onto the clear bank of the stream before camp. Wind buffeted his face. Yellow stems cracked underpaw. His aching chest heaved. *Warriors run like this, not medicine cats!* Regardless, when he saw Birdsong practically glide across the stepping stones into more reeds, Eelpaw's streaming tail quivered with urgency. He pushed his hind legs further, more strongly, frustrated he couldn't run as fast as a HillClan cat. Hopefully he had reached camp before MarshClan!
Panting frantically, he and Birdsong fell past the camp walls. Their noisy entrance caused a few otters to squeak and dash right past Moonclaw, who leapt back with a startled *mrrow.* Birdsong panted to the agape young cat, "Quickly, wake the warriors! And Hawkstar!"
While she spoke, fluid silhouettes slipped between swaying reeds, circling the nursery like slinking black fish. More flickered in his peripheral vision, lurking in the shadows. As cats peered out, as a battle cry was yowled, the apprentice felt his limbs stiffen, his mouth run dry. **We're too late, Eelpaw!** Change screeched. **They're here!**
"MarshClan, they're here!" echoed Birdsong's yowl. Within a matter of heartbeats, the dormant camp scattered into a crazy whirlwind of screeches and fighting cats. Moonclaw raced to the nursery, where

MarshClan cats dragged Birchflower from her den. Birdsong bristled and nudged Eelpaw roughly as she scrambled passed, "Fetch cobwebs, marigold, any battle herbs that can be used now! I'm going to find a safe place to heal wounded cats; CreekClan needs us!" She paused to lick his flattened ears, "Good luck. Remember what I told you."
A medicine cat can adapt anywhere if they try. So will I! Warm determination shocked through Eelpaw's veins, making his limbs burst with sudden speed. He skirted past Littlestone clouting a tortoiseshell, leaped over Squirrelfur rolling with a black apprentice, heading straight for the medicine hole. It was situated close to the nursery - where most cats were fighting. *I'll be the fastest apprentice any medicine cat could wish for!*
He collided into a blur of blue and grey.
Eelpaw rolled to clumsy stop. It was Blueripple, emerging from the medicine den snapping at a grey tabby she-cat. Flicking dust, the pair scuffled before Blueripple crushed the tabby's shoulder into a muzzleful of leaves. Warrior training kicking in, Eelpaw instinctively restrained the she-cats' lashing hind legs as Blueripple snarled, "Destroying herb stores is a coward's tactic!"
"Let me go! Don't you recognize an ally?" Light blue eyes blazed, "I'm the one who helped your son this green-leaf!"
A flash of recognition and uncertainty pulsing through him made him hesitate and release the MarshClan warrior's hind legs.
"Moonpaw?"
"Yes! I mean, I'm Moonrose now, but-"
Blueripple sliced Moonrose's jaw. She hissed in pain. Sticky red pooled his mother's claws and drenched the marsh beneath, "But no cat helped my dead kin, did they? No cat has helped Eelpaw's anxiety, have they?" She whipped her head to him for a heartbeat, "Go and heal your Clanmates-"
Moonrose's hind leg struck Blueripple's belly, and the she-cats were fighting again before Eelpaw could nod. Hopes lifting, he spun around, only to find a stunned Reedfang on his belly, howling as a light brown she-cat slammed down with the force of a badger. Almost brushing pelts, Willowpaw and Nightpaw clung to a bucking auburn tom's back like twin burrs, gouging rivers of claw marks with their hind legs. Eelpaw raced past them all. His paws slid on marshy blood. Its stone tang clogged his head. His stomach fluttered with queasiness. He fought down panic.

Eelpaw was trapped.
In the heart of the skirmish.
How many cats would be injured by now? Change's mew pierced above the dreadful noise, bringing Eelpaw to his senses.
Help me! Eelpaw wailed to it, ducking under a brown apprentice's swiping paw to some cat. He barely heard Hawkstar yowling orders to fall back to water above the cacophony.
We have to fight our way through!
Fight? The word exploded in Eelpaw's head as squabbling cats smacked and shoved into him, too busy fighting to notice. He stumbled upright. *I haven't fought a real battle since I was a warrior apprentice. That was moons ago, Change.* Gaze frantic, he wildly searched for a gap through the smothering waves of pelts, the heat of battle humid and stifling. *How could I raise a claw now? I would be useless!*
Let me help, it purred. A flash of panic sparked through Eelpaw.
No, no! I won't let you fight for me again! Determination, now cold fear, forced his paws to charge past fighting cats, barely dodging snapping jaws and spraying blood. He hissed when a stray claw stabbed his flank, choked for breath when a leg pummelled his stomach, vision whirl as a tail slapped his cheek. Hot pelts pushed him sideways, towards the willow where the streams outside of camp merged. Away from the medicine den.
We must leave the centre of the fight, Eelpaw! Find another route!
Eelpaw's mind buzzed. The medicine den had one entrance. It was near the nursery. The fight was moving to water. The nursery was near the willow-
I'll go round the back! Eelpaw thought in delight. *I'll follow my Clanmates then back track across the streams!* A hard, cold sensation splashed his thoughts. A shiver vibrated through his freezing pelt and insides, the heat of battle unable to suppress it. He was at the stream!
When he was at the edge of the skirmish, he sprinted past Littlestone and Squirrelfur again, skimming across pebbly shallows. Plumes of reeds were thinner here, outgrown by the old willow that creaked in the slightest breeze. Moonlight-drenched droplets flying from his pumping paws, Eelpaw had zigzagged past the remaining cats when a black shadow slammed his stomach, crushing his breath. Caught off guard, he slipped and yowled in pain, cut off by

water gushing down his throat, blurring the world above dark blue and white. Cold, tugging currents wormed past his fur, distorted sound to booming vibrations when his head smashed against rocks and mud.
Then claws hooked him upright.
Coughing then gulping air like a fish, his dripping whiskers trembled in the biting wind while he struggled to grasp his senses once more. A large fuzzy black shape. Claws gripping him. Hot breath evaporating water that hovered on his oily fur.
"Well, defend yourself then, apprentice fishscum!" the black shape hissed, "I just prevented you from returning to your camp!"
Jolting, Eelpaw's scent glands detected familiar scents among all the crowfood, fish and water, "Is it...Shadowpaw?" His voice slurred, dizzy with shock.
"Yes. But I don't remember you," Shadowpaw hissed, narrowed amber eyes vivid against the night.
The apprentice dug his claws into the ground against the current. "But, why? Why attack our camp?"
"To warn CreekClan." He splashed water into Eelpaw's face, though he barely reacted. Shadowpaw sniffed with disdain.
A long tail quivered.
"I expected more claws than words."
A long tail swiped his paws.
The world vanished underwater.
But, facing the sky, the CreekClan apprentice forced to allow himself to be held down by Shadowpaw. Now that his senses had cleared a little, he remembered his father saying that even a CreekClan cat could drown if they panicked and swallowed too much water. Even in a stream. But he also remembered that most non-CreekClan cats didn't know how to swim. Or hold their breath underwater.
So, playing limp for a moment, he waited until Shadowpaw reared up. He spun, planted his forepaws into the ground and dropped his weight. His hind paws kicked Shadowpaw's belly but water resisted his movement so much that the impact recoiled up his leg, up into his belly, forcing what little breath out of him in a stream of bubbles. He clamped his maw shut. Pain burst in his tail-tip. He tried to lash out again, but more pain exploded when he was yanked tail-over-head onto his back. Claws sunk into his exposed belly.

Shadowpaw's distant sneer rumbled over him, "Shouldn't CreekClan warrior apprentices fight better in water?"
Hope and panic surged Eelpaw upwards. Yet Shadowpaw's weight counteracted him he tried to reach the surface, his shoulders bumping on a rock. He wanted to yowl, "I'm a medicine apprentice! I don't fight!" Healing more wounds than inflicting them meant his fighting skills had drained over time like a bat sucking fruit. He thrashed and flailed. As Eelpaw's vision became hazy, as blue and grey seemed to merge and his lungs ached, Change hissed, **I won't allow you to drown!**
For a heartbeat, Eelpaw muscles froze, unable to even gasp for air. Then, a familiar pinprick shivering between every fur strand, his neck was crushed by an inside squirm that slowly swelled and filled his head and body, shoving his feelings and control aside. His prior fading senses sharpened, and he burned with energy, with power that made his claws flex with satisfaction. In a jagged, but precise movement, an unsheathed paw slapped water into the blazing eyes of Shadowpaw. As his opponent recoiled, Eelpaw hurled out of the water with an oddly high-pitched screech of fury, gouging his left cheek with a vicious slash. "**How dare you hurt him**!"
Shadowpaw smacked onto the stream bank.
Droplets stained the gray water red.
Eelpaw's blood froze.
"I'm sorry!" he gasped in his usual low, squeaky tone, "I'm really sorry, I didn't mean to!"
Change's anger swirled inside him. **Don't be sorry! Shadowpaw wasn't sorry to attempt murder!**
Shadowpaw, panting, clenched his fangs while hobbling to unsteady paws. His rough tone wobbled, "Of c-course you meant it. We're fighting."
The two toms paused.
Amber eyes glared defiance into blue.
Eelpaw cringed.
"I don't fight. I-I'm a me-"
"We *are* fighting," he snarled, claws singing against stone as he charged, "I will never be defeated!" Shadowpaw lunged, but Eelpaw merely sidestepped, tripping him with an outstretched paw. It hissed in mockery, leaping the shallows to land on and tussle wildly with the apprentice. Hearing the yowls of the main battle returning, Eelpaw was terrified at the fierce rage of Change in his belly. It

writhed like a striking adder.
"**Not if it means Eelpaw dies!**"
With an internal surge of vicious energy, blurring scent, sound, sight together, Eelpaw realised he was somehow pinning Shadowpaw.
With a paw clamping on his exposed neck.
Yowls surrounding them again, Shadowpaw's vulnerable underside bulged and pressed beneath Eelpaw's pawpads, warm, squirming. Struggling for breath. "**Nothing else matters,** " Change was hissing, the higher pitch rasping at the back of its throat, "**expect Eelpaw's survival**."
"But you...are Eelpaw," Shadowpaw's blows were faltering, slowing. His pathetic voice was more hoarse then rough with less air, much to Change's grim relief. It snarled to the arrogant mouse-brain. "**Am I really?**" It ducked as a grey paw swiped where its head should be, and used the momentum to start crushing Shadowpaw's flimsy neck. A sticky warm tang flooded its mouth. The hot body beneath it jolted. Gagging filled its ears with harsh vibrations. One was deeper than-
"Cease fighting!" The command exploded around Eelpaw as a cat barrelled into him. They both crashed into the stream with a giant splash. "Didn't you two hear the signal?"
Trembling with cold shock, Eelpaw's bones ached as his self-control flooded into his body like a beaver's dam bursting. A white shape slid off him, hauling Eelpaw back up. Nightpaw, equally dazed, stumbled upright and flinched as water flew from the furious white cat. "Viperstar?"
The white tom's hackles were bristling. "We got we came for, Shadowpaw. MarshClan are leaving."
"S-so we won?"
Viperstar gave Eelpaw a disdainful glance, then his amber eyes widened as he sniffed Shadowpaw's bloodied neck wound. "Well, judging by everycat's injuries..."
The echoes of battle fading from his wind-ruffled ear fur, Eelpaw felt a deep prick of guilt. "I was forced to defend myself!" he protested, "Shadowpaw didn't give me a chance to tell him I was a medicine cat apprentice."
Shadowpaw stepped back, tail twitching, and his mentor's ears flicked, but their surprise was brief. Then Shadowpaw's face curled, snarling, "And that gives you reason to choke me to death?"

"You were trying to drown me!" *And I can't stop Change when...*
"You were both trying to defend your Clan," Viperstar interrupted, "But to me, you both broke the warrior code. No cat needs to or attempt to kill another to win a battle; there's no glory in it. We must leave now, so we'll talk back at camp, Shadowpaw." As his apprentice limped off, snapping at Hawkfeather and the others as they hurriedly chased him out of camp, Viperstar pointed with his tail to somewhere behind Eelpaw, adding in a low voice, "I think *your* Clanmates will deal with you soon."
Eelpaw turned.
Willowpaw was staring at him underneath a reed bed.
She slunk away.
His heart twitched.
When Eelpaw turned back, Viperstar had melted into the night.
Fox-dung.
Drained from Change and dragging his paws to camp, Eelpaw felt anger override his fear. *This is your fault, Change! You promised not to help me again!*
I never promised, Eelpaw. I said I might not.
Splashing in shallows, he felt his brief anger scatter like the fish between his paws as he realized what Change said was true. He crashed blindly through reeds.
Remember how I can listen through your ears, smell through your scent glands? His fur quivered as it continued. **Feel what you feel, taste what you taste?**
Well, I sensed there was danger, that you could have died. I was protecting you.
"There you are, Eelpaw!" a cat yowled as he broke through to camp, "Where in the name of StarClan were you!?"
Birdsong, neck fur wild, paced in front of him like a cornered rabbit. Strange for her, green and white stains streaked her spotted pelt and fear scent hurled off her in waves, expression a grim attempt to remain calm. From his position, he could only just see the Clan clustered behind her, licking their wounds, milling about, unsure what was happening. Hawkfeather and the others burst through the camp entrance, haven driven off the last MarshClan warriors. A worried murmur spread as they slipped between their Clanmates.
Guilty realisation creeped underneath his fur.
He'd been so caught up in the battle, the urgency to help his mentor

had practically vanished.
Failure.
Again.
"While you were gone, I had to ask Weaseldash to help me with injuries! I'm sorry, but not only does he have little experience with medicine, that meant one less warrior was there to defend the kits!"
Mouth dry, his cheek, flank and stomach wounds stung at Birdsong's words.
"We'll talk later. Go and treat Willowpaw's shoulder wound; it seems the most prone to infection, but I haven't fully checked."
Eelpaw nodded, relieved to have something to do. It might take his mind off his guilt. But did it have to be Willowpaw? Regardless, he scanned the camp, unease weighing down his belly as a heavy stone. When he spotted Willowpaw talking to Nightpaw outside the apprentice den, he scurried towards her, every nervous step filled with the shameful knowledge that she had seen Change when it was "protecting" him.
He cringed as he met Nightpaw's glare. The awkward silence pressing on his spine like a fully-grown badger, he glanced away sharply, only to find Willowpaw staring at him too. Besides scratches, a claw wound glistened red on Nightpaw's twitching hind leg. Willowpaw's ears flicked about, still alert from the battle. Had they been talking about him?
"Um, I need to see Willowpaw's wound."
"And not mine?" the black apprentice sniffed.
"I just said Willowpaw, a-and Birdsong said so..."
Nightpaw stalked away, limping from his hind leg. "Then make sure I'm next."
Marsh wet his paws with cold. "...Why is he so hostile?"
She shrugged.
That silence unfolded again.
"So, is it bad?" Willowpaw prompted. Hesitating, Eelpaw examined the wound; the fur around the bite, neither grey nor silver, was stiff with dried blood, though mostly black, fresher blood, streaked brown with marsh, welled inside the holes where fangs would have punctured. Shallower criss-crossing marks told Eelpaw that the open wound had been attacked. Birdsong was right: if the wound wasn't treated soon, the dirt and blood from claws and saliva would infect it deeply.
He prodded near the wound. "How does that feel?"

The tabby winced slightly. "It stings when I think about it." She straightened. "But I'm fine."
"Um, I don't know. It looks quite deep. Did you feel bone crunch when the cat bit you here?"
Her tone grew hard, defensive of her pride. "Did you feel bone crunch when you strangled Shadowpaw? When you looked weird and sounded like a she-cat?"
Eelpaw suppressed the panic lodging in his throat. More guilt and terrible fear flooded through him. He shouldn't explain but he still felt responsible!
"Please don't tell anyone!" he squeaked, "It wasn't me!"
"Wasn't you?" Confusion glittered the she-cat's gaze. "But you were-"
Shame burning his pelt, he hurried away before she could ask more questions, mewing over his shoulder, "I'm going to get an infection poultice of marigold and horsetail and some cobwebs. Lick the wound clean while I'm away, but don't swallow any blood."
Nervousness made his instructions tremble. He still wasn't used to ordering cats.
When he looked forward again, he bumped into Birdsong who dropped a bundle of celandine. Yellow petals scattered across the blood-streaked marsh. Alarm rippling in his chest, Eelpaw frantically gripped the fallen flowers just as Birdsong hissed in frustration. "Eelpaw? Eelpaw, hurry up! I have scratched eyes to treat!" He winced. She sounded much like his mother when she was busy: it wasn't a secret that the two she-cats were friends, so they picked up habits from each other.
"Eelpaw, have you treated Willowpaw yet?"
He shook his head, eyes wide. How quick did a medicine cat have to be?
"I know you're still training, but try to be faster!" She answered his thoughts, "These are battle wounds we're treating - and there's lots of them!"
Before he could apologize, Birdsong pulled the hairy stems from his maw, itching his rough tongue with the taste of bitter friction. He realized how thirsty he was. Then he saw an amused glimmer in her green eyes. "Thanks for picking these up. I've already checked a few Clanmates. Let's see if you can treat more than me, shall we?"
Ears perking, a relieved hope swelled in his belly. He nodded then bounded off to the medicine den, determination making his paws tingle. This he could do! He would be faster than his mentor!

Hurrying further into camp, weaving past his injured Clanmates, he saw the destruction of the prey pile: upturned leaves and small bodies scattered everywhere. He recoiled as blood filled his scent glands and rerouted his path to the medicine den. He heard Dewfeather's growl as he slowed down, "Not only did MarshClan try to harm our kits, but our prey as well."
Sootwhisker snorted beside her. "It makes no sense. Why were those arrogant mouse-hearts attacking us so close to leaf-bare? And why didn't they injure us more? They barely swatted my fur!"
"And that apprentice, Poisonpaw, were they *trying* to start a war?"
Eelpaw hurried on. But a memory nibbled at him. Didn't Shadowpaw say MarshClan were warning CreekClan? What for? What did Viperstar mean MarshClan had got what they came for? Shuddering, he slipped into the medicine den. Dry soil showered and crumbled. As his vision adjusted to the confined darkness, he heard pants rasping into the warm air. Edging closer to the herb store, he dropped his jaw to scent the air.
"Blueripple? Shouldn't you be outside with-"
"Shut up," Fangs flashed silver in a patch of moonlight, though her voice cracked with grief, "Don't you know Hawkstar has agreed to not mention the fact that your father murdered your sister? Again?"
A claw of shock prodded his head. Eelpaw snapped away from his mother's boring gaze, occupying himself with the plants poking out of rock crevices in the second tunnel of the den. The lingering reek of death, fear and lavender made his head feel light.
His mother went on, "I remember Dawnkit. Hawkstar is letting another murder pass." He twitched at the harsh screech of claw on rock, "Warrior code breaker!"
Eelpaw lapped at water trickling deep in a rock crevice where herbs were kept damp for a short time if they became too dry during green-leaf. Cool drops bathed his tongue. He licked his maw clean and began sifting through piles of flowers and poking stems. The sharp and marshy tangs of marigold, cobwebs and horsetail whacked the back of his throat, and before gripping them in his jaws, he mewed, "Weaseldash was trying to stop Honeypaw's pain, I think."
A fierce growl sent a fierce spark in his haunches. He spun. "You are not allowed to say your sister's name if you agree with those traitors, understand?" His mother's harsh snarl, emotion quivering in her curled lips, made his claws clench, his tail tremble. Terrified,

he recalled when she had fought Moonrose, that moment when she had mewed, "Go and heal your Clanmates." She had seemed recovered, but...
"I d-don't know what to think, " The words shook out, mumbled because of the herbs in his jaw, "I'm confused, every cat is confused. Cats are dying, and now MarshClan has attacked us."
Blueripple's snarl curled outwards, harsh movements slowly ebbing like a fish without air. She stayed silent and for a heartbeat a thoughtful expression flashed in her face. She nudged the herbs clamped in his tense jaw, purring, "Go and heal your Clanmates. They need you right now."
Jaw relaxing at her cool nose, he hesitated, unsure, and left the den. Digging his paws into the incline, he barely made out his mother's words, "I still love you, my kit."
His heart swelled.
"Eelpaw! Those herbs for me?"
Nightpaw limped outside the den. His neck fur rippling with impatience, Eelpaw shuddered at his fierce scent. "No, Willowpaw needs them more," he mumbled over the herbs. His breath billowed into whiter clouds than earlier. After the inside warmth, the cold seemed to cling to his bones.
The tom stiffened further. "You still haven't finished? StarClan, you're slow!" Nightpaw moved forward, only to stumble and wince onto his hind leg wound. In an instant, his semi-dark blue eyes narrowed, his pain seemingly infuriating frustration into his spit, "I think I'm too patient for this. By the way, you're right to blame yourself for your kin's deaths. A proper medicine cat wouldn't let them die."
A fresh wave of guilt and grief hit Eelpaw like a falling rock. As the tom left, he stared with disbelief as Nightpaw hissed at Pounceprey when the black-and-white tom bounded toward him. What could have made Nightpaw snap like that? His argument with Reedfang a moon ago? *It's true. I'm not a proper medicine cat yet.* After his short session, and the battle today, there was little doubt: he needed more training.
Weary with responsibility, Eelpaw trotted, tail down, back to Willowpaw who, licking her wound, had moved to the tree hollow's far side, at the back where the Clan had gathered closer to the Fallen Oak. Reedfang paced the trunk as if a
meeting was about to begin. Sure enough, as Eelpaw sat down and

grinded marigold and horsetail together in his paws, the deputy yowled, "Cats of CreekClan! MarshClan ambushed us tonight, and I know you all want answers, but now is not the time; Hawkstar was severely injured by tonight's battle and I, the committed deputy of CreekClan, will have to take over his place for a while."
A panicked murmur shot around the camp like a forest fire.
"Don't worry, Hawkstar will recover in no time. He just needs some rest, and so do all of you. After you've been healed by or while you're waiting for the medicine cats, please bury the spoiled prey and sleep." Surprised yowls burst from a few of the cats, but Reedfang simply raised his tail for silence. Spreading the poultice on Willowpaw's shoulder, Eelpaw admired how more confident Reedfang was after a moon of deputyship; now his black chest puffed with pride, but he still pawed his nose-tip. Could Eelpaw be confident one day? "Yes, if you don't know, those fox-hearts spoiled our prey, but our herbs are okay. Patrols will run as normal so speak to Icetalon. If you're too injured, speak to Moonclaw on rebuilding the camp. Both will begin at dawn. CreekClan must remain strong."
Just as Eelpaw secured the poultice with sticky cobwebs, his heart raced as wind swept his ear fur. Birchflower skidded towards the gathered Clan, and they turned to stare at her. Tail rippling, Reedfang mewed urgently to her, "Birchflower? Why do you look so panicked?"
Clumps of fur torn from her tortoiseshell pelt, the old queen panted heavily, "Pebblekit, Skykit. My kits, they're gone!"

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I know that life ain't always good to you
I've seen exactly what it put you through
Thrown you around and turned you upside down
And so you, you got to thinking there was no way out
You started sinking and it pulled you down
It may be tough, you've got to get back up because

I wonder why nobody's waiting on you
I'd like to be the one to pull you through
Your darkest times, I'd love to be the light that finds you
I see a silver lining on your cloud
~~~~

I'll pick you up whenever you fall down
Just take my paw and I will help you stand because

You know that life ain't over yet
I'm here for you so don't forget
You can count on me 'cause I will carry you 'till you carry on

Anytime you need someone
Somebody strong to lean on
Well, you can count on me to hold you 'till that healing is done

And every time you fall apart
You can hide here between my paws
And you can count on me to hold you 'till that feeling is gone

Count On Me - Default

~~~~

6900 words.

A whole rewritten chapter.

I beat my own record.

I've always wondered how cats in the main Warriors series can stand around having long conversations in middle of a battle. Without being hit once. Hopefully I haven't done this. D:

By the way, Change is a pun of change, but is pronounced 'chan-gay' or 'chan-gee' or 'chan-guy'. However you wish.

There was an really creepy drawing I had of Eelpaw/Change but I cannot find it now. :C
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11 Kitnapped

Last Updated: July 27 2017

The ferocious sky-rumble raged on ahead, as Pebblekit was roughly hauled along by his aching scruff. Falling sky-water just as fiercely lashed at his already soddened pelt, damping his confused mood. A small, but sharp pain shot up his spine, just like the forked lightning that brightened the black sky to exceptional lengths. The strange, fern-smelling cat that was trotting along at a surprisingly quick speed, didn't seem to care if Pebblekit's poor rear end bumped along the stony ground or not. He growled. "Ow! Do you mind?" he hissed, blinking the falling water out of his squinted eyes.
Burning amber stared down at Pebblekit as he tried to fixate on who was above him. They narrowed into slits for a split-second before facing forward again. "Quiet, dog. If you're so eager for me to let you go, I'm sure you woulddan't mind me leaving ya out here in the rain."
"Huh? What was that? You're going leave him out here? That's against our orders!" A low, whispery voice sounded to his right, but he couldn't see or smell *anything* besides faintly glowing light blue eyes. Was it a young tom? Or a she-cat with a male-sounding voice?
"D'ya really think I would be as mouse-brained as that?"
"Yes. Now concentrate!"
"Shut up."
"Both of you shut up," echoed a familiar voice with disgust.
Pebblekit knew only one cat would *dare* say anything as bold as that to an enemy cat.
Skykit!
"Galekit? Is that you over there?" Pebblekit mewed loudly, using his brother's pretend-name. They had both come up with them a half-moon ago for emergencies, for example, right at this moment.
"Breezekit! You're okay! I thought we got separated!" Skykit widened his dilated copper eyes in exaggeration whilst staring in shock to his left.
"Can't you two see each other through the rain?" scoffed the amber-eyed cat.

"No, but I can see this she-cat. Looks better in the rain than you."
At that point, the cat carrying Pebblekit and Skykit himself started arguing. But Pebblekit sulked. How had Skykit detected that his carrier was a she-cat in the middle of a storm? Irritation prickled along his spine like a tick that was hard to reach, just as a roll of sky-rumble rumbled overhead. What was that feeling beginning to creep around him?
Skykit excelled at physical activities, yes, but he was a disastrous hunter. So how did his sense of smell sharpen so suddenly in the sky-water? Was it a sensual disorder? Or a genetic mutation of some sort? Some might say it was pure luck this time around, but Pebblekit was a tom cat who second-guessed everything. He was always on the lookout for danger.
"We're near Mars- I mean, the hollow!" The she-cat cried out in relief, breaking Pebblekit's thoughts.
"*Mars*? What's *Mars*?" Skykit was utterly dumb-founded.
Isn't it obvious?
"Wait," snorted the cat carrying Pebblekit.
Maybe if I scent hard enough, I can find out the gender of this cat...
He scented over and over again, but got nowhere. That's if you didn't count his newly achieved success at swallowing ice-cold water whole. How did *Skykit* do it in one go? Pebblekit needed more time!
But of course, there was no time for nostalgia as the four cats were nearing their somewhat-mysterious destination.

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I Am Alive Main Theme - Jeff Broadbent (I Am Alive Original Soundtrack)

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The title...

I'm sorry...

12 Missing Lives

Last Updated: 2016 August 8

This first part happens before the previous chapter.

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"I don't need any extra cats to come with me to find Birchflower's litter. Besides, over half the Clan is injured. What good would it do if our patrol got attacked?" Russetdawn's cold, emotionless tone made Wheatkit shiver with dread.

What would happen if the CreekClan patrol were attacked and needed backup? Mother and he certainly couldn't come and help. He had scented bad water on her fur and MarshClan, and his sensitive ears heard her tiny soft-growl as she tried to comfort herself, but she had sent him away and the other kits to help their Clanmates. He had chosen Mothwing. He took a fervent glance towards she-cat, slouching to the right of him. Her eyes were wide as if she had been bitten by an adder.

"I don't want to hear it, Russetdawn! Every cat has a story to tell about leaf-bare! There's no need to arouse unnecessary panic!" Hawkstar retorted, pacing anxiously on top of the Fallen Oak. His words sliced a ripple of unease amongst the gathered Clan.

"...I think there already is unnecessary panic. The Clan is just waiting for the right moment to expel it," Mothwing muttered under her breath, squeezing her copper eyes shut. A few heartbeats later, she begged, "But do I *really* have to come? Look at how injured Mousefern is! I don't want to leave another family member behind again..."

Russetdawn was barely fazed as she cocked her ears at a distant rumble. Curious, Wheatkit scented the air and smelled the damp crisp smell of distant rain. "Yes, Mothwing. You patrol MarshClan territory more than any of us - even me. It will increase the speed
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and success rate of our search by Thunderpath-lengths."

"That much? O-okay. Thank you," Mothwing meowed, taken aback by the red she-cat's positive comment.

With one nod of her head, Russetdawn faced Hawkstar and the troubled couple started arguing again. Wheatkit couldn't care less about that, so he snuck off towards the back of the warriors den, to recollect his thoughts. "So, due to my off-ser-bations," he murmurmed to himself, glancing at the entwined reeds with sticks, "Pebblekit and Skykit have gone missing in all the chaos. I am such a genius!"

"Ooof course. Just decrease your intellect levels by a substantial amount, and you'll be the best idiotic genius out there," sounded a raspy, teasing mew behind him.

Wheatkit whipped his head around, thinking it was Russetdawn, only to find a unfamiliar cat full on in his face. "WOAH!" he squealed, splatting onto crunchy leaves, "Do have any sense of me-space, your-space, you, you, space-taker?"

"Not that I know of. The other cats don't seem to mind. And don't call me 'space-taker', it is highly offensive," a dark brown tabby she-cat purred. He had yet to familiarize with every one of Clanmates (Wheatkit had stayed with Mother mostly), but his kit-fur quivered with defiance at the she cat's big, big words and rude, rude actions. He'd tell her!

"In your purr-speck-tive... space-taker!"

"Say that again, mouse-brain?"

"Spacetakerspacespaceta-"

Within a few moments, Wheatkit was nudged into the leaf pile again, the she-cat purring with playful delight. Hot hot spreading through him, his vision blurred and cold snapped at his belly. Bustling cats dismissed from the meeting peered in curiously, like a flock of disobedient kits.

It didn't take them long to figure out what happened.

"You got him good there, Hawkfeather!"

"Nicely done!"

"Poor kit... though it is still kind of funny!"

Wheatkit had once again found himself being humiliated once again, but not once again his enemy was one that looked ...*guilty* of a sort. This was Hawkfeather. The brave, tough-shelled cat that usually hid her emotions well. So why did she look so sorry for him? Regardless, he didn't want any cats finding out what he was planning, so he slunk off to his shortcut whilst they were chattering nonsensically like birds. Though, if he had looked back, he would've seen the small, silent shadow following him from behind.

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Fighting was one of Skykit's many natural talents. It was in his blood. But of course, no true warrior could rely on the inner power of one's self to succeed. They needed to train. And they needed to train hard.

Well, that's what he thought...

...until he saw the rogues.

Tough-looking and battle-hungry, they pounced on, from what he barely smelled through the rain, MarshClan warriors in their own camp. Skykit watched with horror as he saw apprentices ruthlessly torn apart by their thorn-sharp claws; kits squealing desperately as they were blocked from their mothers and warriors howling in pain as their fur was torn off. These rogues terribly outnumbered MarshClan at least two to one, and despite MarshClan being the most ferocious Clan, the fighting spirit of these bloodthirsty monsters made them look like abandoned kittypets.

"This fighting," the she-cat above him breathed, "What are they doing? This is against our agreement!"

"Who? What agreement?" the white tom-kit mewed.

"Sssh!" hissed the tom carrying Pebblekit. They skirted the camp,
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pine needles rustling under their paws. Low spiky branches hemmed them in, sky-water slicking all their pelts. Skykit couldn't help but grumble:

"Stinky, cold and wet. What's worse than this?"

"Getting caught?" panted a familiar tom. "Wait, why do you have Pebblekit and Skykit?"

Everycat stared at Wheatkit.

Skykit wished the whole world would swallow him up at that moment.

"StarClan dung, " he hissed, anger and fear burning inside of him. What did he think he was doing, blowing their cover like that?

The bewildered tom-kit tilted his head to one side. "...Huh?"

Yes, of course. The miraculous StarClan knew exactly what worse than being stinky, cold and wet. Skykit tensed. Eyeing the black-and-white tom's younger build than his carrier's wide shoulders poking into his back, they looked like an apprentice and warrior. And wasn't the tom's scent familiar somehow? But if it came to fighting, three kits hardly stood a chance.

"Pebble and Sky? Not Gale and Breeze?" Pebblekit's carrier perked his fluffy ear fur, "Well, all along ya were using an fake name; I wondered why they sounded a bit HillClan. Smart kits. I'm quite impressed."

"I thought of it!" Skykit bragged, voice loud over the battle noise that was coming closer.

Pebblekit dropped his mouth to correct him, just as Wheatkit yowled, "Look out! Scrawny rog-"

CRASH!

Before he knew it, Skykit was yanked out of the she-cat's grasp, and sent tumbling down a ravine. This was how Wheatkit fell a moon ago, wasn't it? With a flash, the colours of his vision mingled into a

blur, and he felt lightheaded. The thick, wet grass irritated his blind senses, and sticky mud squelched beneath him. Before the world faded to black, he heard a crack explode into white inside his head, and the sound of screeching cats.

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The carriers were sneakily ambushed from behind, and in all of the chaos, no cat was sure which faction was the enemy. However, a few moments after the attack commenced, a caterwaul rose from the MarshClan camp. Since the rogues hurriedly raced away, it was assumed that was signalling the end of the attack. The carriers, forced to drop the kits, bounded after them, howling revenge.

Seizing their chance, the kits tumbled after Skykit down the slippery ravine, mewing their distress. Featherkit, already there, bounded across to them, as she had secretly followed Wheatkit the whole way. Shocked, exhausted and not knowing what to do, they crouched huddled underneath a bush, soaking from the rain. They pressed against Skykit, sharing body warmth and licking each other's wounds in comfort. Their wide gazes switched back and forth. Who knew if the rogues were only bluffing, and no kit wanted to get caught by those carriers again.

Then, Russetdawn leading a search patrol came racing across to them, panting hard from running. Birchflower scooped up Skykit immediately, whiskers feeling his body for signs of life, while Icetalon nudged Pebblekit heartily, emotion pouring from his brown eyes and purrs. Even Russetdawn growled her displeasure at Featherkit but couldn't help but nuzzle her kit for a brief instant. Sootwhisker and Mothwing hovered uncertainly, before scenting and scanning the area, unnerved by the sudden silence that had fallen in MarshClan.

Pebblekit wailed his discovery.

Wheatkit.

Wasn't here.

The cats bristled.
~~~~

The wide world suddenly felt larger than before.

~~~~

I'm not alone, I wish I was.

'Cause then I'd know, I was down because,

I couldn't find, a friend around,

To love me like, she does right now.

She does right now.

When autumn comes, it doesn't ask.

It just walks in, where it left you last.

And you never know, when it starts.

Until there's fog inside the glass around your summer heart.

I can't be sure that this state of mind,

Is not of my own design.

I wish there was an simple test, for loneliness.

For loneliness like this.

Something's different,

And I don't know what it is,

No, I don't know what it is.

How come everything I think I need,

Always comes with batteries?

What do you think it means?

How come everything I think I need,
~~~~

Always comes with batteries?

What do you think it means?

Something's Missing - John Mayer

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Rant.

Before editing, I originally thought this and the previous chapter, compared to others, were poorly written due to laziness. But now I remember that I sometimes see this in fanfiction and more.

A few examples are anticlimaxes (Featherkit bluntly revealed to be the "shadow" following Wheatkit) and unrealism (Wheatkit somehow got to MarshClan before the carriers without stopping once). The latter, in my opinion, could be fairly relaxed when it comes to imagination. (Go ahead and do whatever.) But like English teachers say, let's not be lazy. Even I do that sometimes.

And it really annoys me.
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13 Suspicious Findings

Last Updated: 2016 August 17

Purple-tinged clouds glazed the grey-blue twilight like streaks of scar wounds. A faint breeze ruffled Nightpaw's face fur as he slipped past Willowpaw's silver huddle, her still-injured form stretched across two nests. Bird song broke the silence as he peered at the den that seemed too big for only two apprentices.

Pouncepaw should be here. Honeypaw should be here. Even Eelpaw should. A pang of grief and loss nipped at his body, still weary from the previous night's battle. His brother was a warrior. Honeypaw was dead. Eelpaw was a medicine cat. Frustration spiked his spine fur straight. If Birdsong didn't have an apprentice, she would have been there to save Honeypaw. Or if Eelpaw had been training from six moons, Honeypaw would have had more chance to survive. *I didn't want my denmate to die, but she did*. So had Streamsplash. So had Foxmuzzle.

It wasn't fair.

He stalked outside, a stronger wind wiping the warmth from his smoke-black fur. He shivered instinctively. Though it wasn't dawn yet, the Clan had started rebuilding the destroyed camp, and sent out search parties to look for Wheatkit. Nightpaw was (thankfully) not doing any of those chores. Reedfang couldn't boss him around forever!

He flicked his ears and eyes around.

Clear.

He slipped past Squirrelfur, Hawkfeather and Weaseldash, who lingered near the rock where most warriors hung about. Their heads hung low, and their paws twitched as if about to head out. Pretending to groom his fur, he listened for a moment.

"Hawkfeather, I really doubt a Thunderpath would attract much prey."

"You assume, Squirrelfur." The brown tabby's gaze flashed as vivid as green-leaf, glad of the attention. "Near the Green-leaf Thunderpath, there's an overgrown patch of low-growing shrubs that water voles love."

"Overgrown patches mean we would have to stalk," Squirrelfur's dark ginger fur puffed out, "We're CreekClan, graceful swimmers, not lumbering BirchClan badgers!"

Weaseldash's brown tail-tip curled around equally brown leaves. "But Hawkfeather seems right. I've scented prey there on patrols. And there aren't as many monsters in late leaf-fall."

Squirrelfur hesitated, mildly irritated scent blooming from her pelt. "I still think we should hunt closer to camp - a few days ago, I think, Hawkstar said he saw otters catching fish a few streams away. Plus, I hate the smell of monsters."

"Well, perhaps since MarshClan have been very disruptive lately..."

Hawkfeather twitched her whiskers. "Let's go then."

Wet grass squelched under their paws as they left. Nightpaw's black fur flickered like a shadow across their bright pelts as he sneaked past on light paws. As he slipped towards the shortcut behind the warriors den, Reedfang hissed to him from outside it. "Nightpaw!" He hurried back and forth, amber eyes wild, "Why are you crouching like you're infiltrating an enemy camp?"

"I'm going hunting." Nightpaw calmly faced his mentor. In an instant, he was shocked when his older brother's shoulders squirmed with stress.

"Actually, you're helping the medicine cats today. I did make that clear yesterday."

Nightpaw felt his back fur tense instinctively. No matter what he tried, he always seemed to argue when he talked with Reedfang. Why did he always make conversation difficult? "I want to hunt for

the Clan before leaf-bare destroys all the prey! Besides, you said, 'Talk to Icetalon for patrols'. I'm going to-"

"No!" the black tom declared, "As my apprentice, you report to me. You're not a warrior yet."

"But we are," Sootwhisker mewed behind him, long strides rustling leaves as he padded closer. As he and Reedfang turned to face Sootwhisker, Pounceprey followed on swift, heavy paws.

Seeming to remember last night's rejection, he gave Nightpaw an uncertain blink. "We would also like to patrol, but Icetalon is in the medicine den, worried about Skykit."

Reedfang also gave Nightpaw a meaningful glance, and his fur burned. In his brief flash of annoyance, Nightpaw recalled Pounceprey's early warrior ceremony. If he had a mentor like Icetalon, not Reedfang who was never sure if he was 'good enough', Nightpaw would be a warrior already. If he requested to Hawkstar, he might be called Nightflash, perhaps, acknowledging his strength, like Pounceprey, which noted his brother's great hunting skill. Or Nightrock, showing his dedication. Traits that would show that he really was good enough for the Clan. Then he realized he was thinking like Reedfang. The uncomfortable marsh itched under his cold pawpads.

Sootwhisker nodded agreement to Pounceprey's words, jumping back from the warriors den as Dewfeather slipped from the entrance, carrying a bundle of sticks. She gazed around her four kits, affection blossoming in her eyes as she saw they were together in a rare moment. Her grey back was raked with healing claw-marks. They all mewed greetings to her, nudging their mother's cheek or head-butting playfully, but Nightpaw wished he knew how to tell Mother about his brothers' distance and problems.

As such, the greeting only lasted for a heartbeat, before Mudsplash, limping from a sprained forepaw, and Blueripple, a nasty gash on her belly, burst out too. They both carried sticks. Suprised, Sootwhisker bounded backwards. He almost stumbled over Rosekit and Stormkit playing mossball in his haste. A brief purr bubbled in Nightpaw's throat. Moving towards the camp entrance in order to

give the repairers more space, Sootwhisker shook his fur, huffing with amusement and embarrassment. Twitching whiskers, his brothers followed him. The black-whiskered tom attempted to brush away the comments the warriors and kits were making. "Yes, Icetalon said you'd know what patrols are required, Reedfang."

The deputy tensed immediately, almost sagging under the added responsibility. He meowed with brisk authority, "You two can go on a dawn patrol with Mothpetal near MarshClan. It will support the search patrol if they get attacked, even though they won't cross the border. We all know how MarshClan is." He glanced at the pale sunbeams breaking through the willow tree. "Mothpetal would be leaving now."

At Reedfang's hint, Nightpaw expected Sootwhisker and Pounceprey to scamper off to find Mothpetal. They didn't. They twitched and Sootwhisker mewed, "Is something wrong? Why are you so distant?"

Reedfang cringed. "I-I'm deputy. I have to be." He swished his sleek tail repeatedly, herding his brothers away. "I have to talk to Nightpaw. I think Mothpetal is near the Fallen Oak."

Sootwhisker blinked. Pounceprey's black ears pinned back. "Odd," he murmured before dipping his head, and trotting away with Sootwhisker.

Pressure squeezed itchy holes in Nightpaw's stomach. "Why do they go out on patrol and not me?"

His brother, in a ginormous curve, whipped and pushed his muzzle forward, whiskers mere kitten-steps from his. Head tilted back, desperation flashed in a bold amber gaze, "Because they are warriors. They are a higher rank than you."

"Doesn't matter. I see Willowpaw go on patrol with warriors. Why can't we all go on one big patrol together as brothers?"

"We were chosen once by pure chance, when there weren't so many problems. Now, I'm busy as deputy, Sootwhisker and Pounceprey are busy as warriors, and you should be busy preparing for your apprentice assessment, so go and help the medicine cats."

"But helping medicine cats isn't-"

"Helping the medicine cats is also a warrior's duty. Last quarter moon, Sootwhisker collected poppy seeds for Birdsong. He didn't complain and neither should you!"

The apprentice whipped his tail, anger beginning to overwhelm his frustration. "StarClan's sake, stop bossing me around!"

Reedfang flinched back, the desperation in his eyes burning in his voice, "Please, listen to me!"

"If you listened to *me,* I would." Nightpaw spat. He glared, eyeing Reedfang as desperation sagged to exasperation.

"Being deputy is hard. Not only do I sort out patrols, I have to step in for Hawkstar, make decisions while letting every cat have a say-"

"Are you really doing that?" Nightpaw allowed challenging defiance claw into his hiss. It was in the code that a Clan leader's word was law, but how about deputies? "You're focusing more on making every cat think well of you. You're obsessed with reputation, not leading a Clan!"

His brother stared at him.

"Reedfang!" Willowpaw came bounding across from the apprentices den, halting a few fox-lengths away. Wind ruffled her dawn-stained silver fur, eye edges still crusted with sleep. "Sorry to interrupt, but Mudsplash sent me to you. He can't train me because of his injury, but it seems every cat is busy." She eyed Nightpaw, ears flicking back and forth. "Should I practice with Nightpaw? For our assessment soon?"

It was Nightpaw's turn to stare at Reedfang, hoping he would remember he was going hunting. Though hunting with a friend wouldn't be bad either.

Reedfang plodded off without another word, head and tail drooping slightly, "No, I think Nightpaw would like to be alone. Would you like help to the medicine cats?"

Willowpaw blinked, following the deputy. "It's not an order? Um, sure..."

Nightpaw had never seen his brother like this. A moon ago, he was modestly boasting about his new, shining rank, and now he was this tense, unmotivated wreck. What had caused such a dramatic change in such a short time? Was it all of the startling events that had happened in the past moon? Was it that Reedfang couldn't handle the pressure?

Shaking his head, Nightpaw saw sunbeams, stronger yellow than pale now, break through the willow branches, warming the sleepy camp that now echoed with kit squeaks and rustling pelts. He waded through the shallows of the camp stream, remembering that blood had been splashed into these waters the previous night. But, he couldn't ponder about now: he had prey to hunt.

A short time later, he was tracking the stiff, warm scent of a water vole near the Green-leaf Thunderpath. The cool, crisp air complemented the gurgling stream that muffled a leaf crackling under his pawpads. Unlike a BirchClan cat, CreekClan cats were unable to slip through undergrowth silently, so instead he hid in the shadows of tangled reeds and low-growing shrubs. Camouflage was his advantage. He stalked forward, hackles down, stopping whenever he stepped on stray leaf litter. The vole, meanwhile, was frantically mending a woven nest above the streambank, long snout nudging purple flowers about. It barely stopped to perk its ears.

Until a crash, ferns lashing wild, sent the brown rodent racing off, alerted. Nightpaw chased after it, but only pounced on his own reflection, spraying shimmering droplets of water. He immediately felt the relentless tug of the current, so he retreated back to the bank. He spat, scenting the vole's nest in order to catch the scent trail again. He only caught a faint trail of Eelpaw's and Birdsong's scent.

"If you make a lot of noise while hunting, you'll scare prey. Just like you did just now," advised a very soft, very muffled voice.

Out from the shrivelled ferns came Gorge. Twigs and leaves dangling from her light brown fur, mud splattered her silver-blue

paws.

"Why are you here? Kits should be at camp!"

"And so should you, *Reedfang,*" - Nightpaw winced as he realized he sounded like his brother - "Just like me, shouldn't you be helping the medicine cats?"

He wiped his jaw, nervous that this kit - any kit - was speaking so much like a warrior. "I'm hunting. Medicine cats can't help if their bodies don't function, so deal with it."

Gorge opened her mouth, then shut it slowly. Then, she padded off through the bushes.

Her tail signalled Nightpaw to follow.

~~~~

You were always so far away
I know that pain so don't you run away
Like you used to do

Roses in a field of white
Bloodied by the thorns beside the leaves
That fall because my paw is
Pulling them hard as I can

Memories in a nest at home
Yellowing and green with mold
So I can barely see your face
Wonder how that colour tastes

You were always so far away
I know the way so don't you run away
Like you used to do
Like you used to do

Brother - AIC
~~~~

14 Deluded Futures

Last Updated: 19 August 2016

So Birdsong needs juniper berries, water mint... Gorge relayed the endless list of herbs Birdsong had requested in her mind. Most of the names she couldn't remember, let alone list their uses.

An impatient meow broke her from her thoughts, and Nightpaw stiffly padded up next to the young she-kit. He seemed quite cross with her for running off without him: she could tell by his lashing tail and frustrated expression. But he probably was like that because he hadn't caught any prey. But of course, with Nightpaw, you never knew *what* to believe.

"Gorge! Stop prancing around like a fox with a kittypet collar! And why do you always run off without permission?" he grumbled, scuffing the ground.

Gorge merely purred with amusement at his annoyance, bouncing on each paw.

"Well?"

"I really wanted to show some cat this," she murmured with excitement.

"Speak up, for StarClan's sake! I swear by the fleas in my nest, if I ever get you as my apprentice..." he hissed, rambling on and on.

The light brown she-kit ignored his annoying comments, and set out to find what she was searching for. *He sounds exactly like his father, Scarface.* She nosed her cold nose through the bushes. A faint, sickly-sweet scent wafted into Gorge's nose, and made all of her senses tingle. In front of her lay a tall but trampled shrub, which felt springy and moist beneath her paws. Tiny berries drooping from purple bell-shaped flowers, sparkled like a river on a sunny day.

"Blackberries! Yummy!" she exclaimed.

Leaning over on the tips of her paws, her neck muscles ached from trying to reach so far. Nightpaw had seemed to have stopped rambling, and peered over to where Gorge was. He looked as surprised as she was happy, when he observed the peculiar scene.

"What in the name of StarClan are you doing?"

"Well, I really really want to eat one of these berries." she mewed, bushing up her twitching tail.

"They don't look edible."

"Try them. These are blackberries, but Twoleg's grow them too!"

As Gorge meowed the word 'Twoleg', Nightpaw harshly spat on the ground. She ignored him (again) and went about taking a nibble of the tempting berries. She scrunched her nose.

"Hmm, these blackberries are tangy, not sweet!"

She realized Nightpaw had stopped mewing. "Tangy? Drooping flowers? Those aren't blackberries."

Then the cramps started.

~~~~

Eelpaw's heart felt a racking jolt of pain as he stared down at Gorge's condition. The kit groaned and wriggled in the moss nest, a blob of brown underneath green. Her sides heaving with breath, he winced at a harsh wheeze.

StarClan, StarClan help! I can't let another cat die!

You must learn how to not panic in a crisis . That's how you will save them.

The Voice's words gave little comfort.

"Eelpaw," she slurred, "Why do you have three heads?"
~~~~

She was getting worse! Heart racing, he dashed the herb store.

"Juniper berries! Eelpaw, my stomach hurts!" she coughed.

"You better hurry. Even though it's sunhigh, every cat knows she's still contagious to nightcough!" Nightpaw hissed, thumping the soft ground with his tail with anxious urgency.

Birdsong, who had asked him to treat this patient, watched his progress uncertainly.

Time seemed to slow down as Eelpaw hurriedly raced to reach the juniper berries, with guilt howling in his ear the whole way. He could've prevented this, couldn't he? He could have warned all of his Clanmates that not only deathberries were poisonous!

He spotted the last batch of juniper berries in a small crevice, and scooped it out, along with some yarrow and dock leaves. With nightshade berries ingested in Gorge's stomach, he would need to expel the poison as quickly as possible. He skidded past the herb storage, and raced to where the other cats were waiting.

"Will she recover quickly?" Mousefern's sigh was solemn, weary. Eelpaw couldn't blame her; she had witnessed three deaths within a moon, and the death of Wheatkit was still possible. Her glum expression was masked in the dark gloom of the underground den. His fur suddenly pricked with cold.

"She's a kit, so I doubt the Clan thinks she will survive. Like Stonekit." Yet Nightpaw's big amber gaze watched with hopeful impatience.

So many cats are relying on my success! Too much pressure!

He threw down the herbs next to a surprised Birdsong and hissed, "You treat her! You save her! I'm no fit to be a medicine cat; every cat I try to save dies, and all my emotions get in the way!"

With that, he bolted out of the medicine den. Fresh air and dust whacked his muzzle as he bumped into Dewfeather's rear. Straining to see above the shoulders of gathered cats, he mewed an hasty apology while she turned to face him. Usually humorous eyes were

creased with fear and worry.

"This is what my son's and Mothpetal found on their dawn patrol."

Then he saw them. Saw the rogues.

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Home - Gustavo Santaolalla (The Last of Us Original Soundtrack)
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15 Trouble

Last Updated: 2016 August 30

"Huh? Rogues? Where?"

Rosekit scrambled out from underneath Stormkit's play-wrestle, and bounded over to Eelpaw. Wind-whistling leaves whirled as they charged forward.

She had never seen so many outsiders at once.

Dumbfounded, the young tortoiseshell gazed at the hunched band of rogues, all looking serious, but wary. They were sheltered underneath a clump of ferns, patiently waiting for the leader it seemed. That's what she got from all the stares she and her Clan was giving them. The uncertain rogues were hemmed with cornering glances and suspicious whispers.

"They look..."

"...easy to fight!" Stormkit concluded.

"That's great?" Eelpaw squeaked from beside Dewfeather, "B-but I'm not sure that..."

Rosekit mentally sighed, "Just look at them! I'm sure they're fine, Nosey. You're just being pawannoyed again. I'm going over to say hi!"

Ignoring their protests, she padded over to the small group and attempted to be a polite adult, "Well, hello there! Welcome to CreekClan! What could you possibly want?"

A cat, large for a tom, padded forward, a bit reluctant, after getting a few nudges from the cats behind him. He was black and white, countless scars stitching the great patches together. He put more weight on his left side and his burly features gave a pathetic air of feigned importance.

"We were wondering if we had the right Clan here," he mewed, rather amused, "and it seems so."

Stormkit stalked forward, "You seem quite suspicious to me."

As he bellowed, a fine clump of fur quivered on his nose. "Sorry if we look suspicious, kit! We just like to make sure we'll all be safe, just like any other cat would."

"Hmmm... I don't like being called 'kit'." Stormkit narrowed his dark blue eyes.

"My bad."

"How come none of the others are speaking?"

"Sharp one? To be honest, we prefer to let one cat speak at a time. Just manners, you know?"

Rosekit interrupted the conflict. "But shouldn't they be adding something to support all of your claims?"

The rogue group flinched like she had asked them an awkward question.

"Shouldn't your leader be asking me this?" the tom countered.

"Touchy!" Stormkit grumbled. He seemed to be losing the upper paw. He probably already had, as he gave Rosekit a nudge, sulking. "You talk to the mouse-brain."

He seems to like talking about cats as a whole, or as a 'we'... I wonder why? Before Rosekit could speak-

"Move away from my kits *immediately!"* snapped a moody voice behind them.

Out from behind the gathered Clan, Russetdawn stomped over to the rogues. Her flattened ears twitched like they meant business. "Are you going to stand there like mindless mallards, or move?" she demanded, glaring.

Bad timing!

"You see, I was just talking to these delightful kits of yours-"

"Here he goes again," a tabby tom with grey paws muttered.

"Quiet, Lichenfoot!" hissed the lead tom.

Rosekit's tail twitched at the name. Why did it sound like a Clan cat? Were the rogues trying to become like the Clans?

"You're exactly like that feeble grey kit said, touchy as usual." Lichenfoot lowered his copper eyes.

Stormkit instantly exploded, "Feeble is the wrong word, horse-dung!"

"Lichenfoot isn't as bad as horse-dung!" astonished a symmetrical, white she-cat. "But neither is this kit feeble." Her plumed tail, outlined in a pale gold morning light, flicked next to a pale grey elder.

This pale grey elder grumbled, "What an insulting bunch *you* are!"

Plodding over to Hawkstar, who had started dismissing the gathered Clan, Rosekit and Stormkit stared as Russetdawn curled a protective red tail over them, though the kits were too big to be wrapped entirely. The elder had the same pelt-pattern as Mousefern, but white flecks and pale blue eyes contrasted against a huge lump in the side of her throat, as if something was stuck there. She realized how scrawny the rogues were.

Before any cat could reply, the scarred tom gently reassured his rogue-mates then declared, "Let's introduce ourselves now, shall we? Some cats call me Sharpbone, but that's not important. Your kits here told us that you are the river Clan known as CreekClan. Therefore, so we both feel at ease, I shall tell you our group name in the language type you cats would prefer." The tom did not seem to notice the queer blinks he was given. "So, instead of the Raven section of the Lake, please call us.... the RavenClan."

The rogue group's fur behind Sharpbone rippled like one giant

wave. Sharpbone obviously hadn't consented this name change with the others. Rosekit's belly gleamed with pride as frantic whispers from the rogues confirmed this. She dared to ask, "You're a bit small for a Clan, aren't you?"

The white she-cat sniffed, offended, took once glance at her before whispering to Lichenfoot, "But we didn't rename ourselves, did we?"

"Tell us the reason why you are here with such a large patrol," demanded Hawkstar suddenly.

"Impatient, are we? As you know, a kit has been kitnapped, correct?"

"Does this mean you know where they are?" piped Eelpaw, out of the blue. Every cat jumped at his sudden appearance.

Sharpbone raised then let his shoulders plop, "Maybe, but lately our territory around the free spots of this lake have been in decline. You were concerned about this, Yarrowthroat?"

The elder perked up from whispering and meowed boldly, "Yes, thanks to MarshClan and their large-scale attack on this Clan. Against our orders. But don't worry, we made sure they knew what they did wrong, the rude cats."

"But why did you attack them..." Russetdawn slitted her pupils.

"...let MarshClan fail to take some kits as hostages..." Hawkstar continued.

"...and then come to us?" Stormkit finished.

"As a matter of fact, *we* have the kit, but the reason why is simple..." Sharpbone raised his head, as if stealing a kit was grand and proper, "...we *need* territory."

"So, after MarshClan attacked us, you followed them to their camp, teach a lesson by attacking them, then take Wheatkit while they were distracted?" Rosekit mewed. The adult cats looked at her with surprise. Her tail quivered at their stares, but her whiskers fluttered because she had come to a smart conclusion before they had.

"Wheatkit? Is that his name? Pretty much," mewed the white she-cat.

"I see. We want them back immediately," Hawkstar raised his tail.

"Then what would be the point of having a hostage?" Sharpbone swished his.

"True, but why kits?"

"Why not?"

"Give us our kits back. I've already asked once."

"Only if you give up part of your territory. Or get MarshClan to."

Hawkstar yowled, earning alarmed looks from CreekClan who had continued daily life. "No! CreekClan will *never* comply with that!"

"I agree!" Eelpaw hissed too loudly to Russetdawn, "We must speak to the other Clans about this! What if they have missing kits too?"

Sharpbone swiftly turned and motioned his patrol to follow him. Before he left through the camp entrance, he mewed, "Then I suppose you will have to try and rescue them."

Rosekit stared at Stormkit.

Stormkit stared at Rosekit.

They both nodded.

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The pale-gold kit sighed.

Since Dark Light, Wheatkit had been inside this tiny den for forever and ever, and now the Biting Moss was walloping the tiny entrance with Biting Light that filtered through tree-lengths of ferns. With his sensitive kit-ears, he heard the mewls of other kits and patter and chatter of many non-Clan paws and maws. Heather crashed together and the flutters of ground-cooers drowned out the distant
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lake waves.

Prior, he has been snatched by the scruff just before he bounded into the ravine with his den-mates. He had been carried, half-dazed, through squishy marsh, cold streams and long grass that whipped scars around his muzzle, into a space dominated by ferns and heather. A camp. His whiskers clenched backwards when he thought about how exposed the area was, but the rogues had given him moss soaked in water to lick off. Some toms and she-cats who smelled of milk had licked him clean, purred when he had pounced on a moss ball they had given him, which had made his belly curl with lightness. However, instead of letting him play with other kits (they smelled of trees), also stuck in dens, they had ushered him into his own dug-out den. Alone. Like the snackbird, none of them had returned since.

He wished they did, and hoped they didn't.

He wanted Mother.

Too exhausted and uncertain to go outside, he chewed on the moss ball, idle, most of his energy drained from the previous night. Shifting on an engulfing nest of poky feathers and itchy grass, he stretched his limbs, but he kept whacking his head on the low ceiling. An aching throb had developed next to his ear. Better than Russetdawn whacking him though. Now that hurt.

Really hurt.

The Biting Moss soared and dived for ages, and only once at mosshigh did the rogues come to give him mouse and more moss-water. Later, he had been startled as yowls echoed around the camp, but all he scented was ferns, new rogues and heard, "They're back!" Through the thick ferns, he managed a glimpse of black, white and grey pelts being headbutted and licked in greetings, but little else of interest. Now, with Dark Light approaching, Wheatkit could feel cold soil press through the itchy nest. The stale stink of fox started to cling to his thin kit-fur.

Then he heard things.

Pawsteps.

He scampered to the entrance. "Can I come out now?"

"Shut up, Flea! If you don't stay quiet, we won't be able to save you!" Rosekit, yes, Rosekit hissed, tiny fangs flashing.

Wheatkit was baffled.

"The only reason we risked our worthy lives to come here is because we wanted to become apprentices early."

Oh.

"Yes, and since I led Russetdawn's kits here *safely,* I'm sure I can become an apprentice first." Skykit thrust his way forward, and waved a sleek white tail like a bouncy flower, "I'd better; it took me so long to sneak from my father and mother!"

"If you didn't have such a great sense of smell, we would have been lost," muttered Stormkit.

As the three kits had started to move, Wheatkit wriggled through the ferns, pawsteps bouncy and light with relief. The ferns were tall enough to hide a kit or young apprentice, but adult cats would be seen easily. The quadruple sneaked around other dens, which had other kits mewing inside. Skykit sniffed, "Those kits smell like BirchClan! But there isn't a mother-"

"We only came here to save one kit!" Rosekit flicked an ear toward the dug-out den, "Look how many cats are beside it!"

Skykit flicked a quick glance above the ferns before making a weird face. "But the rogues stole-"

She glared.

He ducked his head. "Yeah, let's go."

They scrambled as quietly as they could over the looming forest of green and brown, creating a scarily loud noise. As they were encountering a steep slope, Wheatkit felt a loose twig snag beneath

his paw. Due to his naturally wild reactions, he flailed his paw around, and as a result, tripped over.

Suddenly, with a crash and a tumble, falling rocks shook the muddy ground beneath his paws. He dared not look back, and bolted after the others to the bottom, only to be stopped by a painful jab in his back. His vision turned super-bright for a second, and then blurred, mingling with the intense pain he felt. Beyond that, he heard a deafening ring shaking his ear fur. Wheatkit thought that he was stuck underneath a rock. Not too big - he squeaked as another jab nipped him - otherwise he would be knocked out or have a broken leg. His head fur bristled. This only left a few tiny rocks bouncing down the slope, otherwise the area fell silent. Not realising how much pain he was actually in, Stormkit hissed, "You're always getting into some kind of trouble, Wheatkit! Why can't you learn to stand on your own four paws?"

Then, as a startled meow sounded above him, as the other kits left, Wheatkit could only mewl after them.

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Kinchou Kan - Hirano Yoshihisa & Hidkeki Taniuchi (Death Note Original Soundtrack)

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My intention: 'shaking with fear'

Next word prediction: 'shaking with Her'

Take that any way you wish.

16 Major Problems

Last Updated: 2016 September 12

"I'm not getting caught!" Stormkit barreled through the quivering ferns like a terrified dog, wind coursing through his thick gray fur. Rosekit scampered beside him, tortoiseshell pelt blurred amongst green, and Skykit's four-moon-old paws tripped to keep pace behind them.

"But shouldn't we help Wheatkit?" the tom-kit panted to Rosekit, already exerted from the sprint. Stormkit slowed to allow Skykit to catch up, dry grass scratching his pawpads. He whipped a glance back. The whiskers on his chin stiffened when he realized they weren't even a tree-length from Wheatkit. He speeded up, just as Rosekit meowed, "You're thinking like Pebblekit and he's weird enough. Just run!"

Skykit was quiet but the scent of doubt clung to his white fur. Suddenly he skidded to stop. "Hide!"

They all sprang inside a thick heather patch.

"What-"

"Ssh, Stormkit!" Rosekit batted him with a red-brown paw. "Look!"

The grey kit squinted his eyes, breathing hard. Poky stems jabbed his muzzle, and crackled violently when he pushed through them. His chin whiskers stiffened again. Two rogues: a dark grey tabby she-cat, barely taller than the brown apprentice-sized tom scampering beside her, shouldered through the heather, but the tom kept crashing into stems kitten-steps from his face. He mewed, "I definitely heard a kit in pain, Whisper; my hearing is much better than sight!"

Whisper didn't stop to guide the tom, "You hear everything, Kestrel, hurry up!"

"I would if you weren't so bossy." Kestrel, nevertheless, tackled the slope Whisper was already half-way up. Compared to the heather, he zigzagged through the ferns swiftly. They passed right next to the kits' hiding spot, where Rosekit had to bop Skykit on his ginger stripes before he raced out in surprise. They all hesitated -

- then slunk backwards when the rogues had passed. Stormkit hissed, "Normally I would fight them, but since they have already found Flea..."

Skykit opened his maw with quick defiance, but then they all heard the rogues' surprised yowl and Wheatkit's pitiful mewl. Guilt seared them all. Shame biting his ear fur, Stormkit glanced at his sister, hoping for guidance. Not that he would admit it aloud.

Rosekit shrugged.

And Skykit padded forward, "We must stay and try to rescue our den-mate again! Even if he's an idiot!"

The guilt within Stormkit bubbled with mixed frustration, until the racing memory of the harsh words he spoke to Wheatkit churned like an angry river. Like the one that had drowned his litter-brother. Would Wheatkit die without any help? Dawnkit did. His fur spiked, shame spilling over into anger in his whisper, "Maybe, but we can't! Rosekit said so! If you want to save Flea, you should have brought Featherkit and Pebblekit too!"

Skykit recoiled for a spitting reply, then blinked. "Where is your litter-mate?"

They both glanced at Rosekit.

"She's at camp distracting our parents, remember?" Rosekit was peering through heather, angling her ears for any sign of the rogues. "Otherwise we'd be caught already."

Skykit shook his pelt. "We won't be. Their scent is staler than before. This Whisper and Kestrel must have found Wheatkit and gone back to their rogue camp."

Stormkit could only nod in agreement; all he smelled was stinky

heather sap and ferns. And his belly and paws ached for food and rest. The kits poked tiny noses out of poky grass and listened with tiny ears. Only the wind, other cats. When they sneaked away, oily fur stiff with apprehension, Skykit added, "This is weird but, those 'rogues' smelled like the fur of CreekClan patrol cats. Whisper and Kestrel were reeking of marsh but those other kits smelled of trees."

No cat mewed for a second. Then Rosekit halted on a jutting rock, a red-brown paw hovering midair, frozen and uncertain, "Do you think they left their Clan?"

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Currently, Russetdawn was surrounded by idiots. Specifically clueless idiots. "Don't you have any idea how to find my kits yet? We've been talking for seasons!" *Stormkit, Skykit and Rosekit disappeared, right after the rogues left. And Featherkit insists on playing with me now? They must be causing trouble !*

"Russetdawn," purred Scarface, irritatingly slow, "We're getting there."

"You were always too impatient with decision-making, right from when I was a kit!" The dark ginger warrior, Squirrelfur, added, curling her tail.

"I'm not in the mood for joking around," Russetdawn flashed at the elder and young warrior.

"What bile has got into your fresh-kill lately?" Littlestone huffed, ears flattened at Russetdawn's temper. But his tail twitched with amusement, which made her eyelid throb with impatience. Not only were two of her kits were missing, so were Birchflower's and Mousefern's sons, and if they were harmed, she would take the blame. Regardless, here were the older and younger members of CreekClan jolly and fine, like ridiculous wood pigeons, gossiping at one another. The deputy wasn't better.

"Scarface." Reedfang leaned against the rock where warriors usually sunbathed in green-leaf. "Isn't Nightpaw supposed to have had his warrior ceremony already? He's been pestering me and Hawkstar

non-stop for a quarter moon."

"Yes," Scarface nodded, his amber eyes glazing over with benevolent sympathy. "Word has spread around camp so it should happen very soon. Maybe even today, which will surely excite him."

Russetdawn leered at the inqusitive deputy, and remarked innocently, "Reedfang. You're the Clan deputy, Nightpaw is your own brother and you're his mentor too. So shouldn't you already know that?"

"Y-Yes. I should already know that, shouldn't I?" Reedfang meekly replied. He immediately stiffened up, as the other warriors gave each other awkward, unsure glances.

"Sorry but, why are there so many so secrets in CreekClan these days?" Squirrelfur perked ginger ears. "Is Hawkstar hiding something?"

"Who would know?" Russetdawn blinked, mildly irritated at the young warrior's interruption, "Hawkstar is always hiding something, even from-"

"That's not important right now," Scarface intervened sharply, "I thought we were discussing how to rescue Russetdawn's kits? Not my son's future."

Littlestone tilted his head. "But they were only talking about Hawkstar and sec-"

Scarface spat.

Russetdawn felt her eye throb again, but with surprise. The old tom's hostile yet frail demeanor contrasted sharply with the countless scars on his face. His expression was fuming with a fiery rage and guilt. He padded swiftly to the elders den, black fur bristling.

"You try to appease with elders, all you get is back chat!" hissed Squirrelfur after him, raking the ground, "We were only discussing Hawkstar! What's wrong with that?"

Before any cat could say anymore, they heard a close yowl, "All cats old enough to swim gather here underneath the Fallen Oak!"

"Speak of the Dark Forest, and their claws appear," mewed Littlestone, dispersing with the rest of the group.

Relieved, Russetdawn hurried along wet marsh, painful stalks jabbing between her pawpads, numbing them with cold. Excited mews heated the clear sky, yet the threat of leaf-bare clung to their white breaths, which merged together in a sparse cloud of fog. While the Clan gathered, Russetdawn seated near Willowpaw and Mudsplash, who were not happy like the other cats.

"I fought equally as hard as Nightpaw in the MarshClan raid, but because he saved a she-cat, not to mention a kit, only he will become a warrior today." Willowpaw slumped back on her haunches. "My friend hasn't even done his assessment."

Mudsplash nudged her ear. "It was mere chance he was there when Gorge needed help. Hawkstar is showing Nightpaw how his positive actions saved a life, even to a cat that wasn't born into CreekClan. A Clan must put others before themselves, otherwise we wouldn't be a Clan."

"Yes, but we promised to become warriors together. He even apologized to me for it!"

"Willowpaw-"

"It's easy for you because you're a tom. Two Gatherings ago, you saw Viperstar talking over Swallowstar, didn't you? I bet Swallowstar couldn't do that to him. I think letting kittypets in is wrong, but Viperstar has no right to embarrass any she-cat like that! Scarface told me that seasons ago toms were inferior to she-cats, before that they were both equal, but now it seems she-cats are inferior to toms!"

Moving up to accommodate more cats, Russetdawn glanced at the brown warrior's expression. It was one of seriously concerned curiosity. "It's strange you're telling me this *now* of all times."

Willowpaw shrugged. "It's like the Clans condemn those who don't fit in."

Russetdawn blinked.

"I'm sure you'll be an insightful warrior." Mudsplash merely purred when Willowpaw blinked at him, confusion twitching in her whiskers. He flicked his tail towards the Fallen Oak.

The excited mews were fading.

"CreekClan," Hawkstar was meowing, Nightpaw's standing form beside him becoming visible. Perhaps she would be sent to find Rosekit and the others after this meeting. Gusts of wind ruffled Russetdawn's pelt, and so she straightened her back and perked her ears towards her mate's words to drive out the chill.

"I, Hawkstar, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on this apprentice. He has trained hard to learn the ways of your noble code, and I commend him as a warrior in his turn."

Hawkstar raised his tail. There was no need to explain what was happening; every cat would have heard the story by now. "Nightpaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code, and defend your Clan, even at the cost of your life?"

Nightpaw almost seemed to bounce on his paws. "I do!"

Hawkstar looked down and meowed to Reedfang, which earned the deputy a few surprised looks. "Do you agree Nightpaw should become a warrior?"

Suddenly Russetdawn understood. Due to Reedfang's and Nightpaw's constant arguments, the Clan considered their relationship warily. Some cats did not even approach them when they were together. But if Reedfang declared his support for his brother...

Reedfang, paws twitching, appeared to flinch at the mass of attention, yet meowed bold and clear, "There can be no doubt, Hawkstar."

Nightpaw's dark blue gaze seemed to soften where he stood.

"Then, by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior name. From this moment on, you shall be known as Night*shade*, in noble memory of helping even a non-Clanborn kit. StarClan honours your strong will and empathy, and we welcome you as a full warrior of CreekClan."

As Russetdawn chanted with the Clan, the deep purrs buzzing her ear fur, Willowpaw's and Reedfang's yowls seemed to resonate the loudest. When Nightpaw, as was tradition, pressed a quivering tongue onto Hawkstar's shoulder and recieved a nose to the head in return, the cries of excitement faded, but lingered like the white fog stirred by their breath. Soon, Nightshade leaped from the Fallen Oak, to be smothered by hearty congratulations, but the hazy sun shafts clawed the bare spot he had left behind.

Russetdawn's mate, looking down with satisfaction, promptly continued, "Nightshade is required to sit vigil from sundown. CreekClan will continue with repairs, hunting and patrols. Since they have obviously been betrayed by the rogues, Russetdawn, Icetalon and I will go to MarshClan-"

Weaseldash growled from the front, "Become allies with Viperstar, the smelly fox? I'd rather join BirchClan!" A few cats nodded agreement. "How can we know MarshClan won't betray us too?"

"MarshClan are too weak at the moment to cause any problems. And I doubt they will want to, not when kits have been stolen."

There were supportive yowls, but Russetdawn noticed a great lack of enthusiasm from a certain cat. Despite Hawkstar's seemingly risky plan, the Clan nevertheless seemed to trust him greatly. But like Willowpaw said, would the Clan trust her if she came up with such a plan? Russetdawn twitched her whiskers.

"We don't have anymore time to waste. Icetalon, Russetdawn, prepare to leave shortly. Meeting dismissed."

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Mello - Hirano Yoshihisa & Hidkeki Taniuchi (Death Note Original Soundtrack)

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Nightshade = deadly nightshade. It wasn't deliberate. -w-
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17 Plans

Last Updated: 2017 July 3

The big, brown tom struggled to march proudly with his patrol. Their muddy pawsteps, light and hesitant, amplified their vulnerable location to the dreadful silence of MarshClan territory. He hissed with pain as a withered vine teared at the sensitive ends of his ear fur, its faded stem begging for a shred of the late afternoon light that failed to prise its way through the towering pine trees. Regardless, the black, needle-infested ground consumed any light or sound that reached the ground.

"I can barely scent over this disgusting pine sap, but," Icetalon growled on his left, "I think it's MarshClan mingled with-"

"-rogues!" hissed Russetdawn on his right, "*The only cats that enjoy the taste of crowfood."*

Hawkstar opened his jaw to the air. Indeed, there was the musky scent of rogues, but also the sharper tang of blood. The lingering stench of fear instinctively made him tighten his throat, and he forced down hot, rising bile. He pretended not to notice the torn furs lodged in-between the bushes. "This confirms that both groups are, or have been, interacting. However, these are only remnants from last night. We can assume that MarshClan have no association with them now. I will have to question Viperstar, though."

Russetdawn spat at the same slime-covered vine that had nipped at his fur, gouging it viciously. "I thought we were supposed to rescue my kits. Does their safety mean less because they are not warriors yet?"

Hawkstar flinched.

"And why exactly are we going to MarshClan *first* instead of the rogues?"

He squeezed his jaw shut.

"Hawkstar, answer me!"

He did not have to, for a yowl above them had competed with Russetdawn's hiss.

They gazed up.

Viperstar stared down.

"Well then, CreekClan. What are you here for?" The leader's tone was nonchalant, but his dull, scabbed fur twitched with self-conscious pride.

"Viperstar?" Icetalon made an effort to flick his long whiskers forward, "I thought only BirchClan cats climbed trees!"

"Um, I heard a suspicious noise..." he mumbled, ears flat with embarrassment.

"So, you didn't check before you huddled up in a tree?" Russetdawn remarked with a snide purr. "What, did you think we were rogues? We don't smell that bad, unlike your territory."

The MarshClan leader flashed his teeth, indignation lathering his yellow fangs like mouse bile for a heartbeat. He slid down the pine tree, and straightened his stance towards the cats he had been fighting a few nights ago. Despite the tension, there seemed to be a mutual respect between them all. Hawkstar guessed that the rogue attack had flattened out the sharp rivalry between them. It was certainly a temporary arrangement, rest assured. "We've come to negotiate a plan to, say, right what the rogues did wrong to the Clans*," he mewed.*

Viperstar grunted. "I suppose that is a good enough excuse for you to stroll through my camp."

He flicked his tail over his back to signal them to follow him. Smug and graceful, he slipped through squelchy mud piles whereas the others became half-stuck in them, much to Hawkstar's frustration. The slope was riddled with more crevices and less water than what

the CreekClan patrol were used to. At this realisation, he forced himself to settle for gritting his fangs together, rather than allowing Viperstar to bathe in the satisfaction at hearing Hawkstar complain.

~

MarshClan's camp was falling apart. Cats were burdened with large collections of branches and brambles. They barely had the strength to drag them, let alone skilfully twine it through the broken dens. Others, fatigued, were collapsed in the sparse rays of late sunshine, nibbling on tiny frogs brought to them by exhausted hunting patrols. Compared to CreekClan, their slashed bodies were riddled with cobwebs and poultices. It made Reedfang's exaggeration about Hawkstar injuries quite offensive; he bore light scratches and a gash. Picking up a faint fear scent, he *noticed* Russetdawn's eyes were darting from side to side. What was bothering his mate?

"That blind cat, and the bossy one..."

"Gone!"

"No scent trail either..."

The whispers emanated from the cats resting, their unkempt pelts twitching like Viperstar's had. They engaged in conversation yet sat separated, not sharing tongues and flinching repeatedly, as if they had just been struck. *What has happened to these cats since the rogues attacked*? he thought.

"Why are no cats *hostile* about our appearance? It was so easy to cross their border," Russetdawn whispered under her breath. "Wouldn't they be more alert after a battle?"

"They look too busy recovering from last night," Icetalon lowered his voice as they hurried past a pair of collasped kits, a black she-cat barely glancing up at them. "Two fights are tiring for any Clan."

"I'm sure both our Clans are coping just fine," Viperstar interrupted, halting at an overhang of rocks smaller than Hawkstar's den. With a meaningful glare at the other leader, he squeezed between the draping vines. A hole; the patrol blinked in surprise. Hard tone

muffled from the rock walls, Viperstar's amber gaze was still centred on the brown tom as they followed suit, "No weaknesses anywhere, yes?"

"We never expected such a warm welcome!" Russetdawn muttered. The three CreekClan cats fidgeted in the moss scattered across the floor, grass poking through several cracks into their fur. After being surrounded by so many trees, the cave-like den reminded Hawkstar of his home for a heartbeat. Hence, he scraped a few moss piles together in his favourite position, reclining languidly as if he were the leader of TigerClan. Icetalon and Russetdawn sat either side of him, a closer distance to Viperstar. The MarshClan cat couldn't help but straighten his spine in brief intimidation.

"Neither *will you* leave with a warm farewell! Don't forget you're in *my* territory," he growled in an attempt to assert authority. "Now, as I said, what are you here for?"

Hawkstar's tone and expression were fat with suppressed annoyance. "As *I* said, the rogues."

"I'm talking about your real reason. Not this fake excuse."

Icetalon flicked his tail. "The rogues are our reason."

"But wouldn't you come here to interrogate me *for reasons why* there was an *apprentice* on your territory?"

Hawkstar quietly thought that Viperstar would have added, "Is CreekClan really that slow?" if the tension wasn't overflowing enough.

"Why *mention it*? Wouldn't any leader want the answer kept secret?" Russetdawn's eyes were narrowing.

Viperstar shrugged eyes opened wide like they were at *t*he Gathering. "Not all leaders are the same."

Noise crystallised on the lichen-strewn stone walls.

"*So,* you're not going to ask?"

"We thought you'd tell us." A burst of hostility boiled underneath Russetdawn's spiky neck fur. "Would we be so mouse-brained as to threaten a leader in their own camp?" *Hawkstar couldn't help but agree.* He knew Viperstar relished toying with information just to create an itch underneath their pelts.

Viperstar's whiskers wilted with acute disappointment. "You CreekClan cats are too serious! Didn't you guess the apprentice was a spy? How do you think we knew where to attack your camp?"

Russetdawn's ears pricked as Viperstar spoke. Her neck fur flattened, and her muzzle tilted in a playful manner. "Oh, a spy? Poisonpaw was so loud, one of our kits found him while playing outside the camp."

A competitive spirit sparked in the air.

"CreekClan must not be as serious as I thought, what, allowing their kits to wander around, " Viperstar's tone crooned with exaggerated humour. "And Poisonpaw is still young. I only had high expectations of his capabilities, a common mistake with talented apprentices. At least he was more eager than you today."

"As a matter of fact, our kit was being supervised at the time. The kit is still *very* young, so of course, they were naturally curious. Plus, as CreekClan has such a large amount of territory to cover, our hard-working warriors are overwhelmed with their duties. They can't patrol everywhere, yet they persevere nonetheless. Wouldn't you call that commitment?"

Before Viperstar could agree*,* Russetdawn purred on, "Obviously, MarshClan has the smallest territory, so your Clan doesn't have to worry about hard work or invasion. What other kind of cat likes mud in their paws all day? Even in the original Clans, there is a legend about a ShadowClan leader who did not like having a small territory. He was named Blackstar, a white tom with black paws and amber eyes. Sounds like you Viperstar. Perhaps you are related? Clan blood is so integrated nowadays, only StarClan knows!

"Moreover, there are rumours, Viperstar. That belly of yours: were

you associating with Twolegs once? Surely you couldn't be a *kittypet*, as that would make you a hypocrite, because you deny kittypets into the Clans-"

"I do deny them!" Viperstar huffed with weight, "I've always been like this!"

"I don't remember seeing Viperpaw round and slow. I'm sure Icepaw or Hawkpaw didn't either. Therefore, I can deduce you are lying. This is outrageous: did you know that cats (mostly kittypets) that are born fat cannot help it? When you go around offending them by lying you were 'born that way', and using barely trained 'spies' to invade our territory, it only shows what kind of a leader you are, doesn't it?"

Viperstar was choking on his laughter. "Yes, a very good one."

Far from growls and bared teeth, the senior warrior and leader seemed to enjoy insulting each other.

Hawkstar and Icetalon exchanged confused glances. Both understood the pair were joking, but how had their hostility convert into a banter? Feeling jealousy scratch his belly, Hawkstar decided to herd the conversation back on track, "If you two are done, today, 'RavenClan' visited our camp and asked for one of our kits for territory. They were led by a tom called Sharpbone."

Viperstar's ears twitched at the word 'kit'. "They never told me this. Not after they-"

"We know what happened, Viperstar, " Hawkstar interrupted, "The rogues told us everything." He twitched his whiskers with smug satisfaction. "Even about having territory in the 'free spots' of the lake."

The white tom snorted. "I only shared the few hunting spots less rich in prey, you know. With the way they were yowling about gaining territory and stealing kits, I expected a betrayal, if you'd call it that. That's why I attacked CreekClan, to get them out of my fur before they destroyed my precious Clan from within."

When Viperstar dropped his head in fake sorrow, Hawkstar guessed that the attack yesterday and conversation about the apprentice was revenge for his embarrassment at the Gathering. Or just to rile him up. Even when he pretended to sob, Hawkstar stared straight ahead. Seeing the CreekClan leader refuse the bait, Viperstar instead flashed a sly glance to*wards them*, "I suppose the kit that was stolen was the same one who was, quote, 'naturally curious'?"

"Wheatkit does have problems, yes," Russetdawn vexed.

Hawkstar and Icetalon flashed her a look.

"The kit with born with nightcough?" Viperstar's amber gaze was intense, his sagged whiskers drooping. His jovial mood had evaporated away like droplets in a hot green-leaf. "Didn't he lose his father?"

Silence ruled, until Icetalon nodded, slow and earnest.

"Foxmuzzle's death was sudden. The poor kit had hardly known him for a moon; I don't think he realised he was dead when I brought his body back to camp... Mousefern, to put it gently, has been...hit hard."

Icetalon did not mention how Hawkstar had demanded Foxmuzzle's body to be removed from camp, nor did he meet his gaze. Hawkstar felt his stomach be sucked into a whirlpool of suppressed grief and dizzied anger for both his deceased and dejected Clanmates. He forced himself to subdue it.

"That's why we came here to find assistance in a rescue attempt of our kit," Icetalon was continuing, Russetdawn in a similar state of angst. "No doubt other kits have been stolen from BirchClan and HillClan too. And now that the rogues have betrayed you, won't they try to steal your kits too?" Hawkstar remembered the pair of tired kits.

Viperstar looked away. "After Clawshadow's son went to StarClan, Ivyleaf has been extra vicious that no cat wants to go near her kits when she's around. So no, I doubt RavenClan will try to steal our kits."

Hawkstar raised his voice above the mournful atmosphere, "Then let's discuss our plans."

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"F*ox*-dung!" Hawkstar cursed as the four exited the cave, "They may seem easy to ambush, but in reality-"

"Mama, did you peer what Pawkstar wfaid?" The tired black she-kit from before was now racing and gaping, barrelling into a queen with a darker pelt in her astonishment. "He wfaid a bad word!" Ivyleaf glanced up, her fur displaced from washing a dark brown tom-kit. She purred and began to lick the she-kit. "Bad word! Bad word! Pollykit is wfad now!" the kit puffed away from her mother, charging towards him. With awfully cute defiance, the kit bopped him on the chest with sharp claws. Surprised, he yelped as a tuft of brown fur came away into her claws. Russetdawn and Icetalon were purring as she yowled, "You pwfouldn't wfay the 'f' word! It makes you wfound like a bad leader! Not ownwey that, it is very negative, po I'm going to teach you to be pappy!"

"Hollykit, I am-"

As warriors began gathering around, peering with baffled curiosity, Hollykit raised her muzzle to the air, "I am weally pfecial 'cause there's ownwely one of me. Look at my wfaile, I'm so pan wfappy that cats are lealous of me!"

"When I'm pad and ownley, I like to wfing a wfong. It cheers me up and wfhows me that I won't be pad for long, ohohoh!

"I AM WEALLY PFECIAL 'CAUSE THERE'S OWNWEY ONE OF ME!" Hollykit *yowled,* making the whole camp wince in unison, "LOOK AT MY WFMILE, I'M SO PAN PAPPY THAT CATS ARE LEALOUS OF MEH! This is my body, and this is mai paw. But if you try'n purt either, then mama will knock you out! (So take that rogues!)"

"I am wfpecial! I am pappy! I am gonna eat! You pave wfeen my pappy world, now get your mouse and leave! I AM PAPPY! YOU AREN'T GOOD! I'm, I'm out of pere!" the she-kit gave Hawkstar a last jab, leaving Viperstar snorting with amusement, "MOSS YOU!"

And with that, she huffed, puffed and stomped back to her mother. Every cat just stood there in a stunned silence. The black queen gently cuffed Hollykit's ears, purring nonetheless.

"Baybe you should mecome Songkit, *sister,*" the dark brown tom-kit mewled. The pair fell down play-fighting and laughing.

Hollykit tugged her denmates' ears, growling, "Perhaps I will, Fangkit. Now it's my turn to dare you!"

Cats couldn't help but purr in amused disbelief. The strange 'dare' seemed to have *lightened their moods*. Besides Hawkstar. He was noticing a few inquisitive and hostile stares from cats he had fought yesterday, so he wanted to leave quickly without another battle. As if noticing his unease, Viperstar headed towards the entrance of camp, tail raised. "Let's conclude this, shall we?"

Hawkstar nodded in relief as they settled near a patch of brambles.

"As I told you earlier, the rogue camp is situated in-between the Horseplace and HillClan's border," Viperstar mewed.

"You know," Russetdawn copied Viperstar's sly glance from earlier, "during the whole conversation, you did not mention how you knew where the camp was, did you?"

"Don't start this now!" Icetalon and Hawkstar impetuously muttered under their breaths.

"As a matter of fact, I was cordially invited to the rogues' camp a few sunrises ago," MarshClan's leader was brimming with smarmy contentment, "RavenClan were tremendously hospitable and their manners were exquisite!"

Hawkstar's mate hissed. "How stupid of them! Inviting you in, then attacking you. Sharpbone isn't the smartest, is he? And don't call those scavengers 'RavenClan'; the very name offends what the Clans stand for."

"Or, Sharpbone is smarter than he seems. He might be expecting an attack," Icetalon pointed out gravely, "Remember he said we would 'have to try and rescue' the kits?"

They all looked at Viperstar.

The MarshClan cat shrugged. "Regardless, I'm not sure *what the rogues have said or done* to HillClan or BirchClan, but because kits are involved, I'm sure they'll lend us a paw. Besides, the warrior code says that in a crisis, all Clans have to help."

"What, even the legendary SkyClan?" Russetdawn muttered sarcastically.

"'SkyClan' was merged with the other Clans moons ago. There was simply not enough space beside the lake. Now, I propose we send out scouts to spy on the rogues for information, and so we know our positions before the ambush. We should release them at different times to decrease the risk of detection."

Icetalon chuckled, *"Who knew* Viperstar could be informative? The kits must have lightened his mood."

Viperstar huffed again, "I will be talking to BirchClan and HillClan tomorrow. If you want to come along, I will wait at the Greenleaf Twolegplace border until the sun fully rises above the horizon. No longer than that. I aim to return to camp by moonhigh at the latest. If successful, we can organise a meeting with the other leader*s to confirm the plans.* So you'd better come."

"Now *that* sounds more like Viperstar," Icetalon added in a low tone of voice.

"Is that appropriate for you, Hawkstar?"

Before Hawkstar could nod, Russetdawn questioned, "Why would we need four Clans to rescue kits? Is there something deeper to this?"

Viperstar licked his chest fur. "The rogues might not be Clan cats, but they have other ways than numbers to gain what they want."

The long-haired tom narrowed his eyes, considering alternate options, before agreeing. He preferred to make his own rules, but nevertheless let this situation slip for the time being. Plus, what were the rogues' other ways? He guessed he would find out soon.

He stood up, leaning towards the entrance, and his patrol followed suit. "All right. Three sunsets from now, we will meet at the barn with battle-fit warriors."

Viperstar raised his voice over the heightened murmurs of the listening MarshClan. "Indeed. Rubbleweed, Pinepaw and Spiderpaw will escort you to the border."

Hawkstar stifled a snort as Viperstar mentioned the two apprentices. Obviously, he was just trying to make the CreekClan cats feel as though they weren't important enough to be escorted by warriors.

As the chosen cats trotted over, Viperstar added, "Before you go, why did you ask MarshClan for help first? Were you missing me?"

Hawkstar met his gaze. "I was rescuing your wounded pelt before the rogues ate up you."

Viperstar fur twitched with self-conscious amusement. "Yes, O Great Firestar, with StarClan's help, we shall triumph." Hawkstar twitched his tail at the mention of the old-Clan name, thought it unusual for Viperstar asking StarClan for help. In the past, MarshClan were religious, but not in public. He supposed, with nightcough and the rogues, these were desperate times, indeed. Or his rival was being sarcastic.

As the warrior and two apprentices warily lead them out of MarshClan, Hawkstar chose to ignore Viperstar's teasing hiss of goodbyes.

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"Hot...so...hot," panted Stormkit, his weight heavy on Rosekit's shoulder.

"Thirsty...so...thirsty," she moaned back, her eyelids drooping. The young tortoiseshell's fur felt like it was on fire despite the chilly day, though she was certain her brother was worse off. He had inherited their father's thicker fur after all, though Hawkstar never even seemed to notice the heat. Was it because he ate so much? Her

stomach clenched at the thought of food, and she almost stumbled over her own four paws in haste. She tried to regain her footing, only to trip over the lumbering Stormkit. Rosekit planted head-first into a foul, sticky mess. It splattered all over her and Stormkit's saggy fur.

Marshes. Closer to home, but nevertheless a stinky, horrid place to pass through.

The sun shined off the lake water tauntingly, reflecting the red cliff guarding CreekClan camp. She dully glanced around from her spot on the floor. No sign of clean water. Anywhere. And she dare not drink the lake water: who knew what was contained in it? She sighed. Skykit, however...

"Isn't it such a beautiful, crisp day?!" he exclaimed, hopping on tiptoe. He didn't even seem to notice the green-brown muck stained to his white fur, "There are so many pretty dragonflies around!"

Rosekit felt a surge of irritation. The same irritation that was produced when dealing with Wheatkit's stupidity; the white fool was acting like a kit. Oh, wait, he *was* a kit.

"We're on the brink of de-hide-ray-tion here, and you're as happy as a sunflower?!" she hissed.

"Yes- Oh! Oh! Oh! Is that the moon in the middle of the day?! Oh. My. StarClan."

"Shut up, you sky-obsessed freak!" Stormkit was deafening in Rosekit's sore ears, "You certainly live up to your name!"

Then a large "snap!" arose from behind the three kits.

"Are those--"

"ROGUES! RUN AWAY!!"

Time seemed to fly past, as within a matter of seconds, a terrifyingly large patrol of rogues were hurtling themselves at the kits. Their paws kicked up a spray of marsh water, and before Rosekit could even think, she was bolting off towards a patch of

reeds.

"Rosekit! Stay by me!" Stormkit yelled to her left, heading towards a rocky outcrop.

"No, this way! I have an excellent plan!" Skykit was bounding off to a dislodged tree stump on her right.

Rosekit skidded wildly, mud everywhere, trying to multitask at once. The rogues were gaining quicker than she could run, so she had to make a decision. And fast. "I don't know what to do!" she cried under her breath, "Who do I go to? I trust Skykit's intelligence more, but Stormkit is nearer...Oh, moss this! Skykit's 'plan' better work!"

Yet, by the time she reached the gnarled stump, Skykit was gone. "That idiot!" she hissed, clawing at the hump of wood, "Where is he now?!"

As if echoing her thoughts, she heard a familiar mew from underneath her. Underneath her?! She awkwardly clambered up the tree root, and balanced precariously on the edge. Squinting, she could barely see Stormkit's dark grey fur camouflaged behind the rocks. Rogues streamed in his direction, a platinum blond she-cat leading the group. Suddenly, she heard a voice hiss behind her:

"Wait. Is that who I think she is?"

And then an unexpected force pulled her backwards into air. "Oof! What the-"

She thumped hard onto soil, winded for few moments. Pitch black surrounded her, the only light being filtered from above. Great. She had fallen into a hole. Well, more like pushed into one.

"Rosekit," a cold, crisp voice mewed, "We meet at last."

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The Ambition Song - illustruction

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What we learn from this chapter:

- I switched the titles from 16 and 17.

- Russetdawn will always win a verbal fight.

- I parodied Liam Lynch's Happy Song.

- I do not own Liam Lynch's Happy Song.

- There was no point in wfinging that wfong.

18 Trapped Under

Last Updated: July 5 2017

Possibly the final chapter of Fallen Leaves ever.

And thank you for the wonderful comments and 14K reads I do not deserve.

~Spark

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Rosekit! Skykit's heart roared with relief in his ears when he caught her tangy scent. When his eyes adjusted, he could make out the orange and white dapples of her fur, stark against the darkness, but his was itchy against the humid air. Suddenly, a rotten odour overwhelmed it. Skykit curled his lip, scrunched his nose. *Ugh! Is there* **crowfood** *down here?*

With twitching whiskers, he watched a silhouette grip Rosekit's scruff and, ignoring mewls and flailing paws, pace itself towards his cornered figure. Was it a fox? A cat? Whatever it was, he needed to rescue his denmate! He lunged for whatever his claws could reach, caterwauling. "Hawaaarrr!" Claws unsheathed, teeth bared, not even StarClan could stop this determined warrior!

BOFF!

Skykit was tossed against the confined walls, throwing up black clouds of soily dust that reduced all to a coughing fit.

"Mrrow? What kind of a leap was *that*? You kits get worse with each generation!" a female voice laughed as the dust cleared. He felt rough pads hold his head down, more gentler than he expected.

Now closer, he realised the scent was a rogue. Then anger took over. How **dare** she belittle his warriors moves! Rogues could not be comprised with; they could only be driven off by force! "Lef go of
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meh head! Fhe warrior code dewands if!" Skykit ordered through a mouthful of dirt. A cold, blue gaze flitted over to him.

"I can't understand you, kit," her crisp voice mewed through the darkness, "but I hope you can understand that with one blow, I can knock you unconscious." Skykit's copper eyes blinked in the half-blackness. He had forgotten how weak a kit was compared to a full grown cat, regardless of any warrior code protecting him. While he scrabbled in the hard dirt for anything to grip onto for comfort, the rogue added, "Neither of you are going anywhere. Unless Rosekit here will co-operate with me."

"Co-operate? Why? And how do you know my name?" The tortoiseshell, pressed against the rogue's body in fear, shifted into a more threatening demeanour. The she-cat glanced down at the sound, chuckled at this change.

"That doesn't matter. Anyway, you will co-operate with me to get closer to your father. You know," a flash of bared fangs could be barely seen, "the leader of CreekClan."

Both kits felt their neck fur stand on end.

"A *rogue* trying to get close to *Father*? That's never happened before, as far as I-"

"I am not a rogue!" The she-cat harshly gripped soil in her hind claws. Skykit was glad it wasn't his head. "I am a loner, and my name is Rose. Not one of those horse-brained cats! Now, do you oblige, little kit?"

Rosekit's fur bristled like a bottle brush, volumized twice its usual size. She spun round to glare up at Rose, "The answer is obvious, mouse-dung! But why choose CreekClan? Huh? Why, *rogue*?"

An even harsher stare flared in the loner's ice-blue gaze, and Skykit felt Rosekit was yowling a death wish. "While idly appreciating the many joys of life, I came to find that something was missing. Something that a she-cat of my age would naturally experience: kits. However, due to a certain...*cat*, that something has been stolen from me. I have returned to reclaim a certain kit from the thieves

who stole her!"

"So that's why you chose Skykit and I to-"

"Why would I voluntarily choose the heartless one that agonized her? Not to mention your egotistical brother too. This 'Skykit' of yours was a spectator and watched on like the rest of those fools, therefore he is only a nuisance. I only 'chose' you because I knew that Hawkstar was your father; I was actually on my way to your camp until I scented rogues in the area. This entire meeting is pure coincidence."

Skykit spat out dirt, "You've been spying on our Clan as well? You're as bad as MarshClan cats!"

"Quiet!" Rose snapped, streaking a lightning bolt of fear up his spine, "Sophisticated details will be explained soon enough, to your leader, of course. Speaking of which, where would Hawkstar be at this current time?"

"Am I going crazy, or did this tree stump just talk to me?" A new voice mewed.

"I think it's just you, Hawkstar," chuckled Icetalon from above. Exhilarated relief came washing over Skykit like a new-leaf storm.

"Da!" he breathed, copper eyes lighting up like a firefly, "Is that really you?"

"Huh? Hawkstar has *another* son?" Rose gave the elated Skykit a look. The kit wriggled his body to and fro, despite being crushed by the loner's weight, "No, mouse-brain! That other voice! My father's out there. DA! DA! I saw the moon today! DA! Can you hear me? DAAAA!"

"Did I...Did I just hear Skykit?" His father worried voice called down towards them, "Is that you down there?"

"We're both down here!" Rosekit called. The loner released Skykit cautiously, as if expecting something, then she triumphantly flicked her ears. Skykit quickly started washing his aching joints, glad to be free. A frantic shuffle came from outside, spraying soil on them

from above, then a darker shadow was overcast on the three cats. Patchy sunlight strained to reach them. The darkness made it hard to view the feline silhouette, but was recognizable when the cat sighed:

"Why is there only two of you? And why is there a she-cat beside you?"

The relieved storm inside Skykit diminished, as the tom he was expecting was actually a she-cat; a red she-cat. He nevertheless forced a fake smile (like Da often did) onto his muzzle as she huffed, "Never mind that now. Hawkstar, should I pull out this sorry excuse for a loner too?" Russetdawn removed her head from the hole, and light shone inside once again, warming Skykit's stained pelt. Rose sniffed at the words 'sorry excuse' but closed her maw after hearing the word 'loner'.

Rosekit glowered at Rose, "No! She's here with the rogues to distract us while they steal more kits!"

"Steal more wha- Wait! They might take Pebblekit! We should get going immedia-"

"Not so fast, Icetalon," Hawkstar mewed patiently, "We will take this loner in for questioning once we have found Stormkit."

Skykit had only just scrambled out the hole as he heard an "I'm here." Blinking past the bright light, he saw Stormkit scamper from behind a stone scarcely bigger than he was. Skykit barely noticed Icetalon intently washing his fur of soil as Stormkit explained in a self-important tone:

"Us three went on an exciting trip to the rogue camp to save Wheatkit but, without my warning, we almost got caught! So we sneaked away but we were almost caught again by this massive rogue patrol! We hid, so they didn't find us, and they went past a while ago, towards HillClan. I think they didn't scent us because we were downwind of them. However, without my early warning again, they would've seen us, isn't that right, Rosekit, Skykit?"

Rosekit and Skykit couldn't add a reply as both Russetdawn and

Icetalon were overwhelming their muzzles with frantic licks.

"HillClan?" Hawkstar mused, drawing his tail around his son in a subtle expression of concern. "Then they must be headed for their camp, which unfortunately Viperstar already told us where. We must return to camp quickly! The Clan has much to discuss."

"And I'm thirsty! Plus, I could use a good fish!" Rosekit whined. Russetdawn gave her an eye between licks.

"I'm sure you can wait until next sunhigh. For leaving the camp without permission, no matter if you were trying to save your denmate or not, you will have to be punished."

"And I think I have the perfect suggestion." Rose's ice-blue eyes glinted beneath the sinking sun.

Skykit became aware of the lack of a rough tongue on his fur; Icetalon had rose to gaze steadily at the loner, fur bristled. "The perfect suggestion?" He whispered into Hawkstar's ear, even though every cat could hear him. "I don't trust her."

Hawkstar - to Skykit's surprise - nudged Icetalon. "We may live in hostile times, with cats crossing borders without care, but lighten up. If the loner wanted to hurt us, she would have backup."

It was Russetdawn's turn to be confused by the sudden mood change.

Icetalon shook his head, amused. "And to think *you* treated every cat with suspicion. Great StarClan, you'll be sympathizing with mice next."

A brief chuckle arose from the full-grown cats.

"Standing around won't feed my belly!" Rosekit demanded.

Russetdawn cuffed her ears gently. "I'll be feeding you to the rogues if you keep carrying on like that." Leaving Rosekit to cringe with amused horror, she stood and waved her tail. "We may as depart now."

Without another word, the six cats hurried towards CreekClan camp.

Fallen Leaves Extras

2 February 2020.
Since Fallen Leaves will not be re-written, I thought I would post old designs for the characters.

This is art that I did years ago, my style is much better now haha.

PLEASE DO NOT REPOST.

Unfortunately, I copied the pose line-for-line from some stock images / other fanart I found for some of them. I can't find the original images, sorry. >.<'
(big artist woopsie)
Hope you enjoy them anyway!

[image]

Wheatkit

[image]

Russetdawn

[image]

[image]

[image]

Featherkit

[image]

[image]

Eelpaw

[image]

Birdsong

[image]

The drawing I posted on Chapter 2 Regretful Memories.

-Hope you enjoyed reading my old fanfiction!